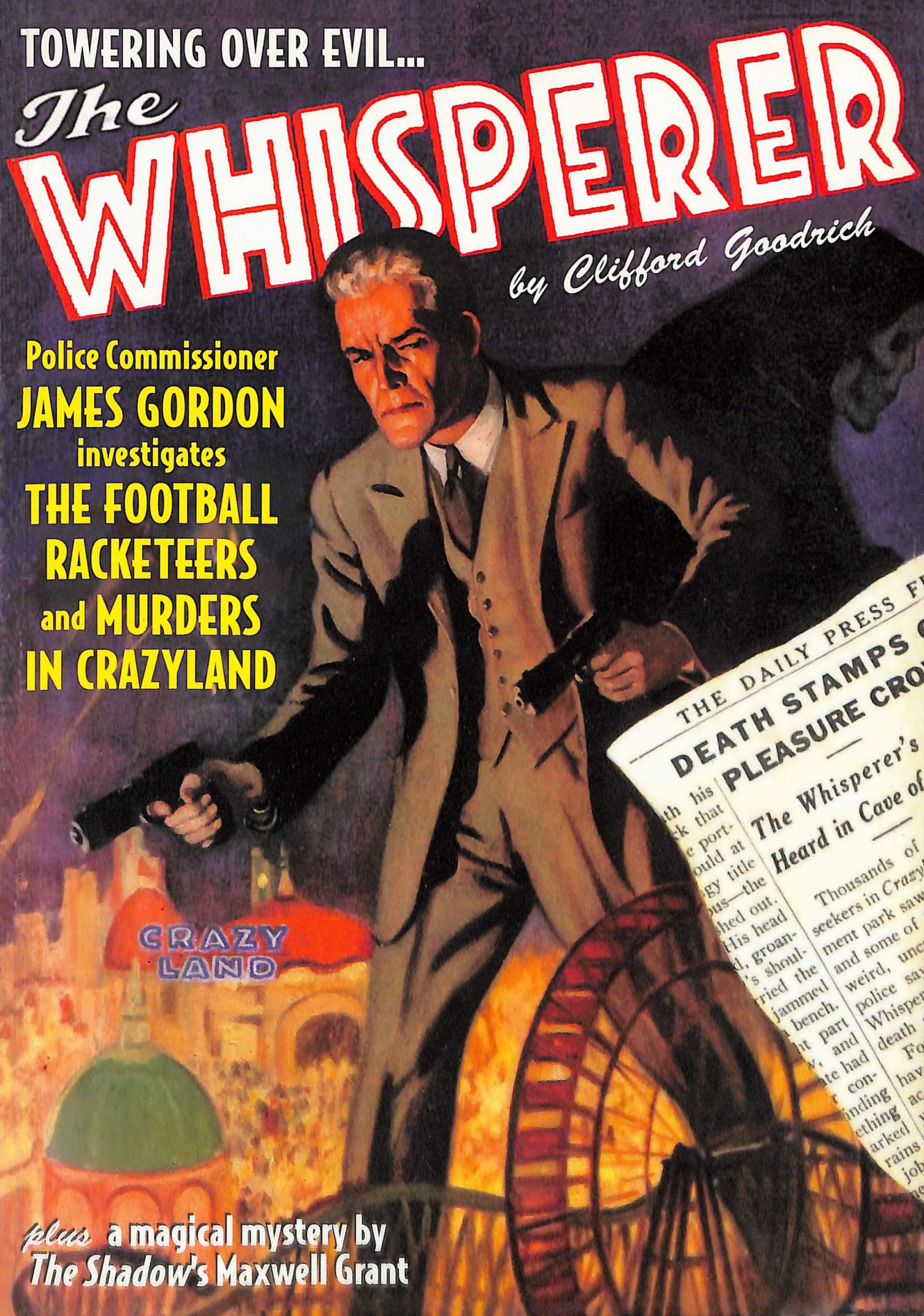
TOWERING OVER EVIL...

The WHISPERER

by Clifford Goodrich

Police Commissioner
JAMES GORDON
investigates
THE FOOTBALL RACKETEERS and MURDERS IN CRAZYLAND



plus a magical mystery by *The Shadow*'s Maxwell Grant

The Football Racketeers, Murders in Crazyland *and* Crags of Death

THREE HARD-BOILED ADVENTURES OF

The WHISPERER

by Laurence Donovan and Alan Hathway
writing as Clifford Goodrich

plus "The Lady and the Lion"—a Norgil mystery
by Walter B. Gibson writing as Maxwell Grant

with new historical essays by
Will Murray and Anthony Tollin

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THREE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF THE GRAY WRAITH

The WHISPERER

Volume 4

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The Football Racketeers

[They ruled the gridiron with threats, murder and extortion—until The Whisperer threw them for a loss!]

By CLIFFORD GOODRICH

CHAPTER I
WHEN A COPPER DIED

WALKING into the murder trap, Detective Sergeant Tim O'Rourke heard a man's hoarse oath of fear. There were other oaths in the black mouth of the alley. A man's call for help was abruptly cut off.

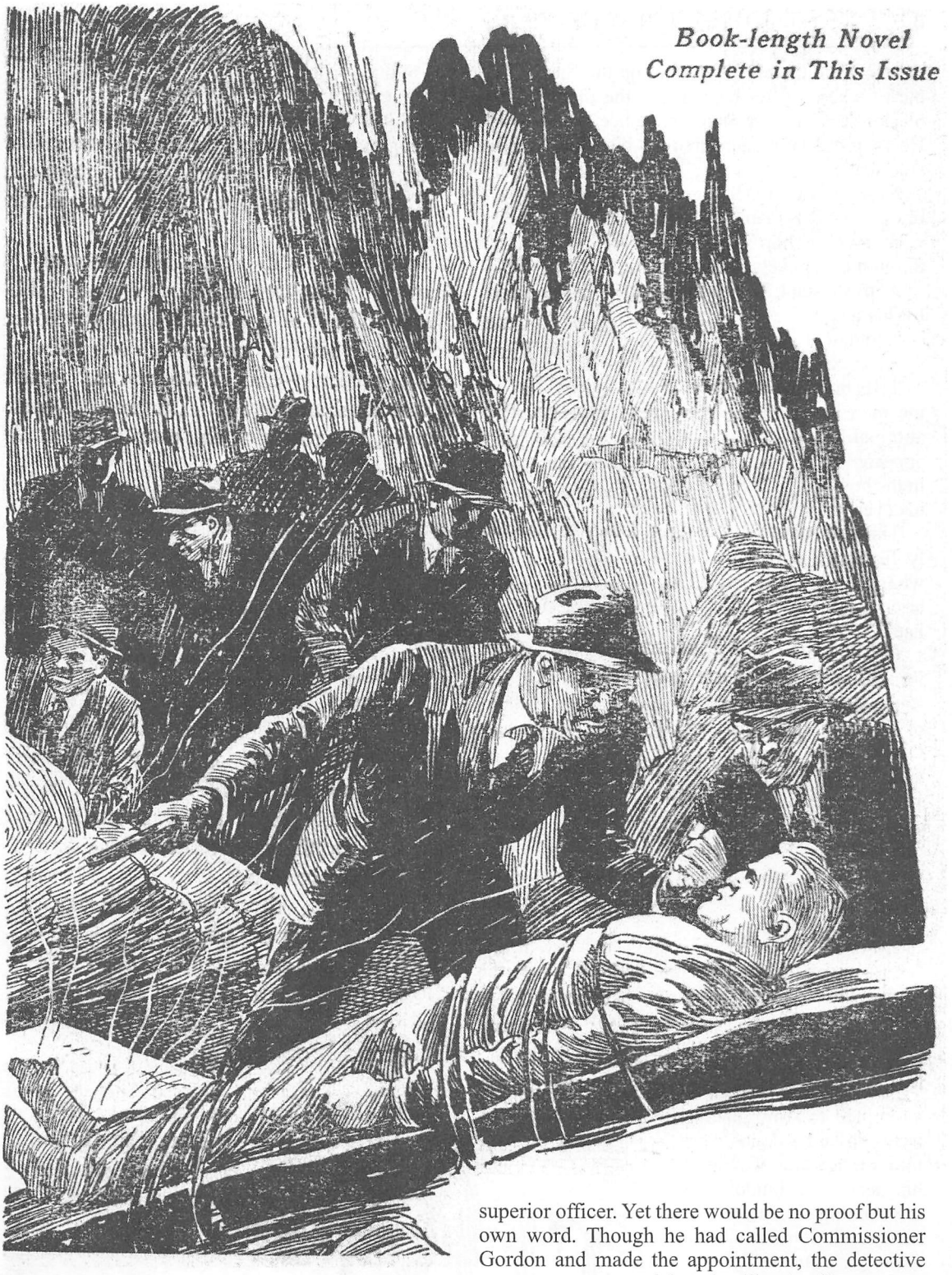
Detective Tim O'Rourke knew all about that kind of a stickup in this waterfront neighborhood. Ordinarily, Tim O'Rourke would have been too smart to have walked into the alley with the light of a street lamp at his back. His hands were empty, and his bulky six feet two was a target that could hardly be missed.

But at the moment the stickup cry of alarm smote his senses, Tim O'Rourke's mind was preoccupied. He had been thinking of what he should tell Police Commissioner Gordon. Could he give the commissioner a lead on crookedness in his own department without becoming a "ratter"?

Tim O'Rourke had never "ratted" on anyone. Yet this thing on his mind made him a little sick inside when he thought of it. The truth should be made known to Commissioner Gordon. Or the commissioner should be given a hint that would enable him to get at the bottom of why a certain important raid in the "upper underworld" had not panned out as it should.

Tim O'Rourke had been thinking, you could not tell Commissioner Gordon part of anything and avoid having him dig out the rest of it. That was why he was commissioner of police, this James "Wildcat" Gordon.

The Wildcat because he was only five feet, five inches. but every inch had been proved to be fighting fury. A commissioner who personally went out and broke cases after his smartest detectives had been baffled.



Book-length Novel
Complete in This Issue

At the time he heard the cry for help in the alley, Tim O'Rourke had an appointment to meet Commissioner Gordon. That appointment was only two hours away. Still, Tim O'Rourke had not decided how much he would tell.

His story would make it look very black for a superior officer. Yet there would be no proof but his own word. Though he had called Commissioner Gordon and made the appointment, the detective sergeant even now debated calling it off.

He was as honest as the day is long, but Tim O'Rourke had to think of Molly, his wife, and young Tim, then but two years old. If anything happened to break him in the department, there would be little for Molly and young Tim. Detective O'Rourke was that honest.

His mind, therefore, was not on the first principle of safety as he stepped into the mouth of the black alley. His gun should have been in his hand. He should have maneuvered his big body into the side shadows.

Now he saw vaguely one man with his back to a brick wall. This man had his hands lifted. Two men were holding him there. One had started to go through his pockets.

At this instant, Tim O'Rourke remembered to go for his gun.

"Hold it!" he barked. "Get 'em up! Turn around!"

THE big detective never would know which of the men in the alley released the full clip of an automatic. Perhaps it was the man who had appeared to be the victim of the stickup, for he was in the best position to catch Tim O'Rourke between his eyes and the street light.

Tim O'Rourke let go two or three shots belatedly from the gun he had not yet lifted. The lead whanged and whined wickedly from the alley bricks. The detective's revolver bounced from his hand.

One of Tim O'Rourke's big hands went to his throat. His fingers were instantly flooded with red, sticky fluid. Their tips went in and touched the bone of his spine where the flesh had been ripped away. Overpowering weakness swept over the detective, and he sat down.

He was dying and he knew it. Only seconds of consciousness remained to him. Curious thoughts, many of them, flash through the brain of a dying man. What was the time estimated when the great jugular vein was tapped? O'Rourke's had been torn completely through.

He could still see. See enough to know it had been a murder trap. The three men, the apparent stickup crooks and their victim, ran away along the alley together. Tim O'Rourke had heard a few exultant words. A name was mentioned, the name of the man who would pay for all of this.

Tim O'Rourke rolled to his side. He desperately attempted to slow the spouting of the blood, by trying to jam a doubled fist into the gaping wound in his neck. The thudding of the running men's feet had died away. Some small boy was crying out shrilly.

"Police! Police! A holdup!"

Perhaps the only witness, that small boy. Tim O'Rourke's hazy senses told him his murder would go down in the records according to that small boy's cry. A holdup! The detective had attempted to interfere.

The final, throttling weakness was upon the dying copper. But his years of rigid training prevailed. Molly. Young Tim. Not much to leave them, he was thinking. The small benefit from the police fund wouldn't go far toward educating young Tim.

He had been deliberately trapped, murdered. But when the homicide squad arrived, there would be only a small boy with a story of a holdup. Commissioner Gordon would never know what he should have told him.

Tim O'Rourke, dying, saw that now. When you are honest, telling the truth is not "ratting."

The big detective could not lift his head. The blood was flowing more slowly. It seemed as if he were actually damming back the death stream with the knuckles digging into the hot flesh of his throat.

Tim O'Rourke made a final effort. He rolled close to the wall. Light from the street shone dully from the dusty panes of a basement window.

Twice the detective attempted to get his pencil and notebook. There was no strength in his fingers. He had an odd thought of Molly having a cold lunch and hot coffee waiting for him at midnight. She had always done that.

Tonight she would be waiting. About that time the filthy hand of a bloody alley rat would be collecting for the death of Detective Sergeant Tim O'Rourke. Perhaps his life would be worth a grand, or perhaps less. It all depended on how much someone feared what he knew, what he should have told Commissioner Wildcat Gordon.

Tim O'Rourke rolled closer to the dusty windowpanes. Slowly, one forefinger dabbled in the blood from his throat. He was compelled to hold the wrist of that hand with the fingers of the other. The bloody forefinger began forming letters.

One, two, three and four. Four letters of a name, crudely scrawled in Tim O'Rourke's life's blood. The hands fell away.

Detective Sergeant Tim O'Rourke could not see what he had written, or if he had written at all. His body twitched and he was dead.

THE small boy who had cried out in the street was the only witness among those who had collected at the mouth of the alley when squad cars filled the block. The boy was a gamin, and delighted to be in the limelight.

"Yep! They was six of 'em!" he exaggerated. "They was beatin' up some fella, an' this cop walks in an' gets it! I seen 'em carryin' one guy away!"

The small boy told much more that was not true. The simple fact of a holdup was established. The members of the homicide squad saw Tim O'Rourke's gun and the gray splashes of lead on the alley bricks.

They could understand exactly how it happened.

But the small man with the wide shoulders and an Army hat cocked over one eye had not paused to listen to the small boy's story. This man seemed to make up for lack of inches by the gorgeousness of his raiment.

His brown suit was of a startling shade. A red necktie was vivid in color. A fresh carnation in the coat lapel matched the crimson necktie.

He was Police Commissioner Wildcat Gordon. His quick feet, encased in brilliantly yellow shoes, stepped gingerly around the pool of blood formed around the red head of Tim O'Rourke. Even the keen eyes of the homicide men missed the lightning movement of Commissioner Gordon as he picked up two small objects.

These were the pocket notebook and pencil of the murdered detective. So the slain detective was attempting to leave a note?

Perhaps a last word to his wife or—

Another man had arrived with Commissioner Wildcat Gordon. He had once been tall, broad-shouldered; but now his body drooped, and he appeared to have shrunken in size. The street light gleamed on a head that was bald except for tufts of hair over his ears.

HE was Dick Traeger, retired deputy commissioner of police, at whose home Wildcat Gordon resided. He was better known as "Quick Trigger," which came from the days when he was the fastest man in the department with a gun. Now old Quick Trigger edged close to Wildcat Gordon and punched him with his elbow.

Quick Trigger seemed to peer nearsightedly at everything. It sometimes was a costly mistake to imagine he could not see so well.

Quick Trigger's legs were across the dusty basement window beside which the body lay. He was looking at the dead Tim O'Rourke's forefinger.

"Dust on his finger, Wildcat," murmured Quick Trigger. "Get a slant at the window, an' then I reckon I'd rub it out."

Wildcat Gordon saw the dusty windowpane. Crude letters were traced in the beginning of a name. A hard, cold light came into Wildcat's almost colorless eyes. Eyes that might have been either gray or blue, but sometimes were only like bits of ice. The kind of eyes that have been known among peace officers in Texas from the days of the pioneers—Texas eyes.

Wildcat Gordon saw; then he followed Quick Trigger's advice. His trousers leg deliberately brushed off the four letters written in the dust by Tim O'Rourke's blood.

The letters had been in the form of printing:

T H O R —

The captain in charge of the homicide squad stepped over.

"What do you make of it, chief?" he said to Commissioner Gordon.

"Plainly enough," said Wildcat Gordon, "there was a holdup. O'Rourke evidently stepped right into it. It looks like a ten-cent job by that kind of a cheap stickup, and that makes it tough."

"Yes, sir," replied the captain sadly, "They're the toughest kind. Just another one of the boys, in the line of duty."

CHAPTER II
THE INSPECTOR'S GHOST

HALF an hour after the discovery of Detective Tim O'Rourke's body in the alley, Commissioner Wildcat Gordon sat across a table from old Quick Trigger. A doll-like girl with clustering brown curls poured coffee for the two of them. When her wide eyes lingered on Wildcat Gordon's tumbled, reddish hair, she smiled faintly.

"Tiny" Traeger, the granddaughter of old Quick Trigger, had little if any respect for the police commissioner of the great metropolis. Someday, she intended to cure him of wearing red neckties and purple shirts.

For this childlike, dainty young woman had definitely made up her mind the day was coming when she would take Wildcat Gordon in hand and cure him of some of his superiority. She judged his having been an Army officer had given him an idea he was the boss of the works, but that did not keep her from being deeply in love with him.

That Wildcat Gordon looked upon Tiny as little more than a child, who frequently needed a spanking, did not discourage her in the least.

Old Quick Trigger now was saying, "So the letters were T-H-O-R—- Maybe I'm off on the wrong foot, Wildcat, but there was the raid last week on the Dirk Thorton dump up in the hills. And it turned up no dice."

"No dice," admitted Wildcat, his Texas eyes filled with cold reflection. "Only I had a call from

Tim O'Rourke today, and he was to see me at midnight tonight. Had something on his mind, but he didn't seem to know if he wanted to spill it."

"Hm-m," mused Quick Trigger. "By the way, Wildcat, Inspector Barthold had charge of that raid detail, as I recall it. He's an old head, Wildcat. Been in the department a long time, hasn't he?"

"Long enough; before I quit the Army and joined up," stated Wildcat. "Seemed to me if anyone could pull a surprise on the Dirk Thorton crowd, Inspector Barthold was the man. That reminds me, Quick Trigger, I had Barthold take another squad out on the cleanup of a bookies' layout a couple of days ago, and Tim O'Rourke especially requested to be excused from that detail. I wonder if—-"

"O'Rourke's always been an honest cop," interrupted Quick Trigger. "You say Inspector Barthold reported the Dirk Thorton million-dollar dump in the hills was all clean?"

"Nothing showed, according to Barthold. Might have been a party of tired businessmen having a few drinks, for all there was in sight. Barthold said there might have been a tip-off, but he couldn't figure out where it came from."

OLD Quick Trigger's apparently nearsighted eyes glowed under his thick, bushy brows. His years as deputy commissioner had taught him never to make direct suggestions. Usually, he kept to himself what he might be thinking.

"Gentlemen's party," said Quick Trigger, in a musing tone. "Investing gentlemen, I suppose he meant. When Dirk Thorton gives a party at his house in the hills for tired businessmen, somebody pays."

Wildcat Gordon waved his hand. His eyes betrayed nothing. He put his yellow shoes on the corner of the kitchen table. Tiny Traeger walked by and pushed them off.

"Having to live in the same house with cops is enough," she said, crisply, "without my having to put up with Army manners in my own kitchen."

"Someday I'll take you over my knee, like the time you lied to me," grinned Wildcat, then immediately became serious. "If I only knew what Tim O'Rourke wanted to tell me. Dirk Thorton's crowd has been branching out. For one thing, they seem to have taken over the whole football racket."

Old Quick Trigger rubbed a reflective forefinger over his polished bald spot. He understood Wildcat's position with the Dirk Thorton crowd and all others like them. Apparently, Dirk Thorton and his opportunities for "investing gentlemen" were inside the law.

If big blocks of the best seats tickets for the football games then in season were somehow bought up, then resold at exorbitant figures, there was not much the law could do about it. If there were some outside gambling, bookmaking on the outcome of the biggest games, there was nothing the police could do about that, either.

These simple facts did not keep Dirk Thorton's nefarious enterprises out of Wildcat Gordon's hair. When a millionaire's estate had been taken over in the hills by Dirk Thorton, the commissioner had been sure the police would be able to put a finger on some direct violations of the law.

T H O R— The bloody letters on the window. Wildcat Gordon had rubbed them out. But Tim O'Rourke had been intending to see him tonight; O'Rourke had never been one to talk out of turn.

Perhaps old Quick Trigger followed the processes of Wildcat's mind. He had been almost a father to the fiery Wildcat before and since he had served in the Army.

Quick Trigger's years in the department had a great deal to do with Wildcat's intimate understanding of some of the men he commanded and a great many of the criminals in the records.

Quick Trigger suddenly stopped rubbing his head. His tone was mild, barely suggestive.

"Inspector Barthold commanded the raid on Dirk Thorton," he said, slowly. "I reckon that couldn't have anything to do with me seeing Barthold out driving with his missus today in his new car. No, I guess maybe he just changed over from that cheaper bus to a bigger car because he's expectin' relatives to visit him, or something."

"Get off the fence, Quick Trigger!" snapped Wildcat. "What kind of a car is Barthold driving? He had a good car, last year's model!"

"I reckon you're right, Wildcat. He had a good car. But now he's got a better one, about three thousand smackers better, I'd say offhand, having taken the trouble to look up the price and finding out he paid cash on the line for it."

Wildcat Gordon had again elevated his yellow shoes to the table, causing Tiny to wrinkle her pretty nose with disgust. Now his feet banged to the floor. He was putting on his coat as he arose.

"I suppose, Quick Trigger, you didn't by any chance just happen to pick up some papers on the street and find out Inspector Barthold had paid off a mortgage on the old homestead in the past few days?"

Old Quick Trigger chuckled.

"Maybe I'm not doin' so good, Wildcat, but that's exactly what happened. I bumped into an old broker friend of mine, and it seems that Barthold has paid off a two-thousand-dollar mortgage in the last week. It was accidental-like. Hey, Wildcat—where are you goin'?"

Wildcat Gordon was whipping through the hallway toward his own small apartment in the Quick Trigger penthouse. This penthouse had been built

by Quick Trigger on the top of a waterfront loft building; the former deputy commissioner had bought it with his years of savings.

When the slower Quick Trigger overtook Wildcat, the police commissioner had slapped on his Army hat. He was putting what looked like an oddly shaped set of false teeth into one pocket.

"I wouldn't take the chance that way, Wildcat," suggested Quick Trigger, who seemed to know all about those false teeth. "If charges were brought against Inspector Barthold—"

"If it could be a drumhead court-martial, I'd go for it!" rapped Wildcat. "In a court-martial, if you know something to be true, you don't waste too much time on technicalities! Charge Barthold with accepting a bribe from the Dirk Thorton crowd, and I'd have the place all cluttered up with peanut politicians! The witnesses, if any, would get cold feet, then what would I have? And Tim O'Rourke died before he could talk!"

Police Commissioner JAMES "WILDCAT" GORDON

With an "I'll be seein' you, Quick Trigger," Wildcat vanished into his inside dressing room. This was a room without windows. It closeted a remarkable array of masculine attire. Wildcat Gordon always dressed several seconds ahead of the current minute.

Now there was but one door into this dressing room. Apparently there was none leading out. Wildcat stepped in among the racks of clothing. There was a slight hissing sound, like the release of air, from a huge cylinder.

Wildcat Gordon was shooting down the inside of what seemed to be a solid concrete column. This was his one-man elevator to the street level. Friends often waited for Wildcat in his outer room, imagining he was in that dressing room.

Tiny came in as Wildcat disappeared. Quick Trigger shook his bald head, and thought:

"Sometime Wildcat will get himself killed. I don't like it. I wish I had never thought of those dental plates. I'm just an old has-been, always getting somebody into trouble."

THE dental plates, of which Quick Trigger spoke, had weird properties. It was more than a disguise. It had become a voice, a whispering menace to crooks that had become known and feared throughout the underworld. It was a strange affair to be in possession of the commissioner of police. And only one other living man, old Quick Trigger, knew of those dental plates.

Perhaps thirty minutes after Wildcat Gordon flashed down to the street and into a plain roadster which bore no insignia of the police department, Inspector Barthold was proving that conscience does not keep all men awake. Perhaps Inspector Barthold snored more loudly because he had been informed that Detective Tim O'Rourke was dead.

There was some moonlight, and no inside lamp burned in the suburban cottage occupied by Inspector Barthold and his wife. The wan luminance of the moon laid a silvery pathway from an open French window on the second floor. There was only a screen between the bedroom and the outside.

Barthold was a heavy lump of a man. He slept on his back, and the sawing noise from his open mouth left no doubt but that he was asleep. His wife slept in a twin bed nearby. Neither heard the window screen almost silently open.

An odd figure stepped into the moonlighted path. The man was clad all in gray. Bushy hair under a round-topped hat had a whitish tinge and made a blur around his head. This figure crossed the room, first selecting the bed occupied by Barthold's wife.

Quick but gentle hands employed a pillow to silence the woman as she awoke. It was no desire of the visitor to harm the woman in any manner. She was swathed in the bedclothing, tightly secured so she could not scream, and placed under the bed.

Perhaps Inspector Barthold, so long in the department he boasted a double chin, heard a slight noise. His snoring ceased abruptly. His cavernous mouth snapped shut. Small eyes opened, but he

Barthold reared up in bed, suddenly kicking out with both feet.

was copper enough not to betray himself by movement at once.

Inspector Barthold first saw that the bedclothing had been swept from his wife's bed. The moonlight was sufficient to reveal the emptiness of the mattress. The inspector could feel rather than hear a vague movement nearby. One hairy hand slowly sought the police revolver in the holster hanging at the head of his bed.

His hand never reached that weapon. It must have seemed to him that a steel trap had crunched onto his wrist. At the same time the room was filled with an awe-inspiring, sibilant whisper.

"Don't move, Barthold, if you want to live! You will do as I say!"

BARTHOLD saw him then, The Whisperer. And no figure ever had less appearance of menace. Moonlight played over an oddly shaped face. A long upper lip and a pointed chin gave the countenance a mildly saturnine appearance. Because of the gray attire, the remainder of the man's rather slight figure might have been anyone.

The eyes were so cold and so lacking in fire,

they gave forth no glow. Inspector Barthold no doubt had his own reasons for expecting The Whisperer might visit him.

Barthold reared up in the bed, suddenly kicking out with both feet. This was an unfortunate movement of resistance. The knuckles of The Whisperer packed a terrific wallop. The free hand let go with all the weight of deceptive shoulders behind it.

"U-ugh!" grunted Barthold, swallowing at least two of his front teeth. "Why, you—"

Smash! Iron knuckles rammed a vile word back into Barthold's mouth. The inspector was a big man, accustomed to rough-and-tumble encounter.

One big hand suddenly fastened in the blur of The Whisperer's hair. A hard thumb with a sharp nail attempted to remove an eyeball from its socket, The Whisperer had to release his grip.

CHAPTER III
THE WHISPERER'S TRICK

THE WHISPERER'S immediate tactics did not come under the well-known Marquis of Queensbury rules. Army stuff of the back bush? Yes. Knees, with the general impact of driving pistons, played a drumbeat on Barthold's scantily protected stomach.

The inspector's lungs collapsed. The hard hands of The Whisperer pulled him from the bed. Still the inspector fought. One of his huge fists sent The Whisperer to the floor. The Whisperer did not arise.

"Now, you overestimated sneak," bellowed Barthold, "I'm fillin' you so full of—*owee!*"

One of The Whisperer's shod feet came around in a vicious circle. A hard leather toe drove into Barthold's unprotected ankle bone. As the inspector sagged, The Whisperer came up, bending the bigger man with his spine across the iron frame of the bed.

The sibilant whisper was in Barthold's ear.

"It will give me the greatest pleasure to crack your spine! Where is the money? I want that Dirk Thorton money!"

"I haven't—I didn't get—"

Either the iron bed frame cracked or Barthold's vertebrae were crunched together. A deep groan came from the inspector.

"Where is it, Barthold? I know you've got it! I want it!"

"But I can't—I won't—"

There was a snapping of bone. This time it was not Barthold's spine. The middle finger of one hand had suddenly been bent backward.

"They tell me, the boys, you had that copper O'Rourke bumped off!" hissed The Whisperer. "So you've got the money! I'll take you one finger at a time before I break your back!"

Barthold was wheezing with the agony of fire running through one arm. He muttered hoarse denials of having received any money. The curious face of The Whisperer, with its long, pointed chin was close. Perhaps Barthold could read death in those cold eyes.

"You can't—you wouldn't take all of it—"

"All of it!" hissed the voice in his ear. "And more! This copper, Tim O'Rourke, once got me out of a jam! There will be no whitewashing you for graft where you're going!"

When a man's fingers are bent backward until they crack, sooner or later that man will talk. And when he talked, The Whisperer put a gag in his mouth and rolled him into the bathroom, where he tied him with strips of sheet off his bed. A sailor would have envied those knots.

A MINUTE later, The Whisperer was removing flat packages of bank notes from a box that had been set upon a crossbeam in the attic. He had some four thousand-odd dollars in his hands.

Back in the bedroom, The Whisperer made sure Barthold and his wife were safe enough for several hours. A whimsical grin played across The Whisperer's odd face. No doubt a maid would arrive in the morning.

What story would Inspector Barthold have to tell?

Or would he tell any? He was one of the few men who had entertained The Whisperer who could not immediately report the attack to the police department—his own department.

The Whisperer had reached the window. Into his mind came the vision of Tim O'Rourke lying in the alley, scrawling a word with his life's blood. No doubt praying a little for his wife and young Tim.

Taking Barthold's money was not enough. The inspector might never be sent to the chair, punished for his part in the murder of the detective; but The Whisperer thought grimly of another way.

There was a method whereby doubtful witnesses, intimidated testimony would be unnecessary. The Whisperer recrossed the bedroom. He could hear Mrs. Barthold moaning faintly. He regretted the necessity of keeping her prisoner, but he knew she was uninjured.

Inspector Barthold had an impressive array of shoes for a policeman. All were of large size. The Whisperer selected a pair showing signs of everyday usage. He left his own shoes on the roof of the Barthold porch. His feet had room to spare in the shoes of Inspector Barthold.

A few seconds listening at the window convinced The Whisperer that Inspector Barthold would be safe for some time. Less than a minute later, The Whisperer had manipulated the lock on the garage

built into the basement. Barthold's own keys turned the ignition in a shiny, new automobile of an expensive make.

"He paid five grand for it, if he paid a dime!" came The Whisperer's voice. "And I'll wager he has it insured to the limit!"

The big car of black and chrome steel finishings proved its costliness by the quietness with which it came into the driveway. The Whisperer was wearing gloves. Like the rest of his apparel, these were gray. They had another peculiar quality.

The gray gloves were seamless. They were of smoothly drawn skin. A fingerprint expert would have had great difficulty discovering an identifying mark.

The Whisperer did not touch the rim of the steering wheel with his hands. His strong fingers gripped only the center of the spokes as the costly, big car floated down the highway. The car was turned abruptly at the first sand road that had been oiled.

Perhaps a mile from the main highway, The Whisperer found the spot he was seeking. The oiled road slanted to a steep embankment. The Whisperer got out of the car. He held the clutch with one hand until the motor was speeded up on the hand throttle. Then he let in the clutch.

Five thousand dollars' worth of new automobile reared over the embankment. It plunged forty feet, turned over and became a mass of tangled metal on the rocks below.

The Whisperer lingered only long enough to make sure there was no fire. Then he walked slowly along the soft shoulder of the road, each step leaving the unmistakable imprint of his feet. Only the shoes he was wearing flopped around. Inspector Barthold's grogans were much too large.

Less than ten minutes later, The Whisperer replaced Barthold's shoes in the closet of his bedroom. Barthold was groaning now, and fighting the sheet bindings. Mrs. Barthold let out a little scream. She had worked her gag loose.

The Whisperer went off the roof of the porch, carrying his shoes in his hands. He did not restore them to his feet until he had reached his parked roadster. A ghostly, grim smile played across his queerly shaped mouth.

THE smile was still grim the following morning, but it now lay across the rough, but pleasant features of Wildcat Gordon. He had summoned old Quick Trigger to his apartment in the penthouse. On the table lay several packages of bank notes.

"You will take that this morning to Molly O'Rourke," announced Wildcat. "The amount is four thousand two hundred, and small pay for the life of Tim O'Rourke, but perhaps it will help his widow."

"You took it from Barthold," said Quick Trigger. "But that won't pay him up, Wildcat. He ought to go to the chair along with the dirty killers!"

"It is to be regretted we can't send him there, Quick Trigger, but I imagine life will soon become very complicated for Inspector Barthold. He cannot report he was robbed by The Whisperer, but he can and probably will declare his new car was stolen and wrecked. You'll see what I mean in a moment."

Wildcat produced a typewritten note. This was signed merely "A Neighbor." The note stated:

> I do not wish to become involved in trouble with an inspector of the police. But I happened to be returning home late last night. I saw the man known as Inspector Barthold deliberately wreck an automobile, a new one, which I have learned is insured by your company. I would suggest an immediate investigation. The car went off the road half a mile from the Shore Lane on the Maquoit Highway. I saw Inspector Barthold walk away from the scene.

Quick Trigger read the note, and his deep eyes gleamed under his bushy brows. One gnarled hand rubbed across his shining bald head.

"Barthold never overlooked a penny he thought he could collect," he stated, thoughtfully. "The insurance company will have a man on the scene as soon as they get that note."

There was no doubt but the automobile insurance company acted with proper dispatch. That same day, late in the afternoon, Wildcat Gordon sat in the police commissioner's office, with his yellow shoes prominently perched upon his desk.

Deputy Commissioner Henry Bolton, a man with a small, round mouth and a hooked nose, was talking with a rather pompous and smaller man who wore gray spats and a tall, silk hat.

The latter was Mayor Van Royston. The mayor was on his way to a public reception. Mayor Van Royston was a perpetual public figure.

Neither the mayor nor Deputy Henry Bolton were admirers of Wildcat Gordon. Police Commissioner Gordon had been appointed by the reform party committee over Mayor Van Royston's head. Henry Bolton had hoped to get the position.

Henry Bolton was saying to Mayor Van Royston, "I know a holdup was reported, but the killing of Tim O'Rourke looks like the work of The Whisperer to me."

Mayor Van Royston turned upon Wildcat Gordon. The mayor's chin was small and round, and he tried to make up for his lack of lower jaw by keeping his head well back.

"You have had weeks, Commissioner Gordon, and this Whisperer continues to commit many

crimes," the mayor stated firmly. "It has become a disgrace to this department. I agree with Deputy Bolton. The murder of Tim O'Rourke looks like the work of The Whisperer."

Wildcat was wearing a vividly red carnation. He pulled off a petal thoughtfully.

"If any man can stop The Whisperer, Henry Bolton can do it," he said, cheerfully. "Henry, I'll put it up to you to find out how much, if anything, The Whisperer had to do with the Tim O'Rourke death."

"I'll get the murderin' crook!" snapped Henry Bolton. "I'll—-"

The door crashed open. The somewhat-disheveled figure of huge Inspector Barthold was pushed into the commissioner's office. Two quiet-eyed insurance detectives walked beside him. One carried a pair of shoes marked by oily earth.

"SOMEBODY will pay for this damn outrage!" shouted Inspector Barthold. "Commissioner Gordon, my car was stolen and my house was raided last night, and now these dumb dicks from the insurance company come out and put the finger on me! They claim I wrecked my car in an effort to defraud the insurance company!"

"That's right, Commissioner Gordon," said one of the insurance men quietly. "We had a tip-off this morning. The car, insured only a week ago, was wrecked. We found only Barthold's fingerprints on the steering wheel and his footprints in the road. A man got to his closet and found these shoes before he could clean them. And he tells us he heard no one!"

"I didn't mean I didn't hear anyone!" shouted Inspector Barthold. "I said there was no voice, only a whisper!"

"The Whisperer!" grated Deputy Henry Bolton.

One insurance detective shook his head with a grim smile.

"I'm afraid something more tangible than your mysterious Whisperer will be required to disprove the evidence of fingerprints and the marks of Barthold's feet," he stated. "We came to you, Commissioner Gordon, out of courtesy, to inquire if you had any desire to interfere or advise us as to the course we should take."

Wildcat Gordon's Texas eyes took in the flushed, enraged face of Inspector Barthold. Wildcat's eyes were colorless, without expression.

"You say you had your house raided, Barthold!" he snapped. "Then you must have been robbed! How much did you lose?"

"Why, I—well, you know I don't have any money!" stammered Barthold. "It's—it's somebody—The Whisperer! That is who! Out to get me!"

Inspector Barthold was completely trapped. Wildcat Gordon was fully aware he was afraid to confess the amount of money he had lost. Without a motive for such a robbery, for the wrecking of the car, Inspector Barthold had no evidence whatever that could combat his own fingerprints on the wrecked car, the oily earth on his shoes.

"I knew you needed money to pay off your mortgage, Barthold," said Wildcat Gordon mercilessly, "hut I did not believe one of my own men would ever go crooked. Gentlemen, this department will interfere in no respect with the prosecution of Inspector Barthold for what looks like a clear case of insurance fraud. Deputy Bolton, you will see that Barthold's rating as an inspector is removed from the rolls."

CHAPTER IV
THE TICKET RACKET

THE morning the former Inspector Barthold was sentenced to from three to five years for attempting to defraud an automobile insurance company, Mayor Van Royston wore a pleased smile into the office of Commissioner Wildcat Gordon. His honor seemed vastly satisfied with himself.

The mayor's head was thrown back far enough to cause his retreating chin to stick out a little.

"Six of them!" he exclaimed, displaying half a dozen cardboard tickets, "Among the best seats, too! And they only set me back twelve dollars apiece!"

Wildcat Gordon's colorless eyes surveyed the mayor, sighting across the toes of his yellow shoes on the desk.

"I judge you've got six tickets for the Harton-Trador game Friday afternoon?" said Wildcat, mildly. "Seeing you get your own box free, I suppose you bought these pasteboards for some friends."

"That's right, commissioner! And did you hear what I said? Only twelve dollars! Why, if I hadn't happened to be a friend of Stan Fortune's, these seats would have cost twenty-five dollars, instead of twelve!"

"Stan Fortune?" said Wildcat in a musing tone. "So he told you where you could get perfectly good three-dollar seats for Friday's big game at twelve dollars each? The broker, Stan Fortune, huh? One of the alumni boys, I take it?"

"Yes, yes, Gordon!" said Mayor Van Royston impatiently. "I know what you're about to say! If you'd stop bothering about perfectly legitimate business and devote your attention to getting after real crooks, the murderers of Tim O'Rourke, for example, we would have a cleaner city!"

Wildcat's feet slapped to the floor. He came to his heels.

"You're an honest man, mayor !" he rapped out. "Nevertheless, every dollar you paid for those six tickets helped put a nail into the coffin of Tim O'Rourke! You and every other honest citizen that helps support this ticket racket is aiding and abetting crooks and the murderers of coppers!"

Mayor Van Royston's mouth flopped open. Deputy Henry Bolton, sitting at a side desk, had a dazed look in his eyes. Neither could understand what had started Wildcat Gordon on his sudden rampage.

"You went down into some side street office and bought those tickets for Friday's game!" shouted Wildcat. "You! The mayor of a great city! Some smart member of good old Trador alumni tipped you off! Perhaps this same smart guy helped this bunch of ticket racketeers corner a few thousand three-dollar seats so they could rook a lot of suckers like you for twelve dollars or twenty-five dollars apiece!"

Mayor Van Royston became very stiff and dignified. He stroked his round chin nervously. A detective sergeant named Thorsen occupied a corner desk. Sergeant Thorsen's square face might have been made of wood for all the emotion it showed.

"This police department, Commissioner Gordon," said the mayor, "is under your supervision for the purpose of preventing crime. There is no law or ordinance against honest men making profit in a business deal. What possible connection could there be between these tickets and the murder of Tim O'Rourke?"

"That's exactly what I'm going to find out!" snapped Wildcat. "I want to know why, three days before the Harton-Trador game, there isn't a reserved seat ticket available, except at extortionate crook prices, and these prices are paid by our mayor and tipped off by some member of the college alumni!"

All of Wildcat's five feet five of sartorial splendor vanished from the office. He left Deputy Bolton and Mayor Van Royston staring at each other.

"Contributing to the murder of Tim O'Rourke?" complained the mayor, in an abused tone. "What's he talking about, Deputy Bolton? If our commissioner starts interfering with the legitimate business of those who take a chance on buying up tickets, we'll have this whole department in confusion."

"Well, it's been in some sort of a jam ever since he became commissioner," stated Henry Bolton ruefully. "And he wouldn't lift a finger to help one of his men. He's letting Inspector Barthold go to State prison; he refused to even sign a recommendation for parole that I was getting up. He tore up the paper."

MAYOR VAN ROYSTON and his favorite Deputy Bolton would have been more than ever mystified by the queer actions of Commissioner Wildcat Gordon, had they followed his swift checkup of ticket speculators throughout the city that same afternoon.

Yet Wildcat made no effort to close any of the several offices, or interfere with the profitable game of selling football tickets for seven or eight times their face value.

When Wildcat informed old Quick Trigger what he had in mind, the retired deputy commissioner shook his bald head in disapproval.

"I reckon you don't mean, Wildcat, you're planning to stick out your chin just because every big town's full of a bunch of suckers that fall for this ticket racket?" said Quick Trigger. "Why, son, the public seems to like to have its pockets picked and—"

"But I don't like to have my best coppers murdered, and some of the others who are paid to be honest, lining their pockets!" rapped Wildcat. "Quick Trigger, you and Tiny and myself are attending that Harton-Trador game, and it isn't going to cost one of us a dime! Tell Tiny to keep some coffee hot tonight!"

Whenever Tiny Traeger kept coffee hot at night for Wildcat Gordon, the next day was likely to find a sudden furor of excitement throughout the underworld and the police department.

Yet the small roadster, turning off a smooth highway under great trees, seemed to be carrying Wildcat Gordon far from what might have been considered any haunt of the underworld.

The neighborhood was not only the swankiest in the well-patrolled millionaire estates scattered about, but it was distinctly far outside any jurisdiction the city police commissioner might possess.

Wildcat swung his little car under trees off the highway. His instrument lights showed he was wearing a suit of the brightest blue, his inevitable red necktie and carnation, his yellow shoes and his Army hat pulled jauntily over one eye.

But before he had stepped from the small car, a strange transformation had taken place in Wildcat's appearance.

A gray dust powdered his rusty-brown hair. A solemn, roundish-brimmed hat replaced the Army headgear. By a quick reversal, Wildcat's bright-blue suit turned to a dull gray. The outside yellow leather was zippered off his shoes.

Wildcat moved among the trees close to a rambling mansion that itself was a million-dollar pile of architecture. The great house was set well back from the highway. Parking space for more than a hundred cars was well filled. These automobiles were of makes that only men of money can afford to own.

The estate surrounding the great house was one of the most beautiful in the whole county. Many windows glowed brilliantly. Some sort of party seemed to be in progress. But such parties were of a nightly occurrence in this exclusive residence.

Once owned by a millionaire, it had passed into the hands of a far different crowd. It was now the "country estate" of the man known as Dirk Thorton, reputed to control the gambling racket of the upper underworld. That his clientele of suckers numbered many prominent citizens was proved by the cars outside and the lavishness of the setting for many games of chance inside the mansion.

Wildcat Gordon was not at this time concerned with any of the illegal games that might be in progress. That was a matter for the county police. The Dirk Thorton establishment he had caused to be raided by Inspector Barthold had been situated in the city.

None would have identified the police commissioner as he took up a position in the shrubbery, studying the windows. He had taken queerly constructed dental plates from one pocket. When these were clamped in place, the whole contour of his face was changed.

The Whisperer, for such he then was, remained motionless as midnight came and passed. But his Texas eyes were marking each car that rolled into the driveway of the gambling mansion.

Those keen, colorless orbs had also tagged lighted windows on the second floor at the back of the mansion. The Whisperer had identified shadows passing across those windows.

THE luxurious room behind the windows observed by The Whisperer would have delighted a botanist. The profusion of flowers, set into scores of vases, gave the place the appearance of a conservatory.

It was reported that Dirk Thorton, a foppish, squeaky, little man, would pay almost as much for some rare blossom as he would for a job of murder. His headquarters in the gambling mansion were in keeping with his odd hobby.

Four hard-eyed men, who lounged about the room, seemed to have no interest in Dirk Thorton's penchant for posies. They might have been contemptuous of Thorton's flowers, if the foppish, little man hopping about among them had not been so deadly.

For all his devotion to his rare flowers, Dirk Thorton had one queer habit. Apparently he was waiting for an important visitor. His beady eyes kept roving toward the door covered by heavy drapes. Between his fingers, Dirk Thorton was pulling a flower to bits.

The thick rug was littered with petals of other flowers he had taken apart during an hour. Yet some of those flowers had cost a fancy price and been sent to him over thousands of miles.

When Dirk Thorton spoke, his voice was thin and high.

"We can use that other two-thousand dollar block, and he'd better bring them along if he wants his split," said Dirk Thorton.

One of the four men had thick, rolling lips and a wart on the end of his nose. "Wart" Dorgan was no lover of flowers.

His thick neck and heavily muscled arms were typical of his position with the Dirk Thorton crowd. When there was rough stuff indicated, Wart Dorgan was the man for it.

Wart now said, "It's all right about them tickets, Dirk, but he ain't in on the big pay-off, is he?"

Dirk Thorton pulled another flower to pieces and said, "We are keeping that pay-off to ourselves. I'm not too sure about that punk, Jack McGregor."

There was no doubt but these unpleasant fellows were discussing the coming football game. Jack McGregor, star quarterback, was the chief reason the wise money on the Harton-Trador game was up at three to one, with Harton on the long end.

This conversation took place about the time The Whisperer had been concealed among the trees for nearly two hours. Had The Whisperer heard the reference to Jack McGregor, he might have prevented a murder, but his purpose here tonight was solely to observe the passing of a block of two thousand football tickets into the hands of the Dirk Thorton crowd.

In the flower-filled room on the second floor, a blue light suddenly glowed at the side of Dirk Thorton's desk. One of the gaming attendants appeared at the draped doorway.

"Number four is here, sir," he stated, as if announcing some visitor of importance whom it was not desirable to mention by name.

At Dirk Thorton's word another side door opened. A man having a professional appearance stepped in. Clearly he was not one of the Dirk Thorton crowd, except indirectly. His eyes went quickly from the four hard fellows lounging about to Dirk Thorton.

"I thought you said we were to be alone?" he questioned.

Dirk Thorton waved one white, effeminate hand. Flower petals showered from his fingers.

"You'll always find them around," he said. "It makes everything safer. Nothing could happen. They never remember anyone. You have brought the block of tickets?"

PERHAPS five minutes before this question was asked, The Whisperer had seen an expensive car arrive. This had not been placed in the usual parking

space. The man who stepped from it entered the gambling mansion by a side door.

The Whisperer had moved over beside an electric wiring pole which stood close to the lighted second-floor windows. His gray figure ascended the pole. Wire cutters with heavily insulated handles came from a pocket.

The branches of an elm tree intervened between the light pole and the windows. The Whisperer noted that one branch brushed close to the wall, so close a small boy could easily have swung into the nearest window.

He could see Dirk Thorton pulling a rare flower to pieces. He heard Thorton's greeting to a new arrival he could not see from his position. Thorton's final words were, "You have brought the block of tickets?"

There was a blue, lurid flash under The Whisperer's hands. His insulated wire cutters snipped through the wires supplying the gaming mansion with power.

Instantly the vast pile of architecture became a gloomy mass of timber and stone, from which issued alarmed cries.

Downstairs, no doubt the "guests" imagined a raid was about to be pulled. There was a wild scrambling for exits.

In Dirk Thorton's flower-filled office the man who had just arrived said, "What the devil and all is this, Thorton? I didn't want to come here myself! Turn on those lights!"

Wart Dorgan had seen the blue flash through the window on the pole outside. But he clumped over and tested the switches. Nothing happened. Wart Dorgan said, "Get to one side, fellows! If it's the cops, they've cut the wires! We can take the tunnel out, Thorton!"

Apparently the "tunnel" mentioned was some emergency exit provided for just such a situation. Dirk Thorton was beside his desk. Without apparent effort on his part, the heavy mahogany desk started to slide smoothly to one side.

It seemed that the visitor who had wanted to be alone with Dirk Thorton also desired to rid himself of that which he had brought with him. Banded football tickets, in series, came from his pockets and were slapped onto the desk in the darkness.

These bundles of tickets were revealed almost instantly. The slender ray of a pencil flashlight came on. Its beam spread and took in the pile of blue tickets. Wart Dorgan swore vilely and let go at the light with a silenced rod. His marksmanship was perfect.

The flashlight was shattered, but that light had not been in a human hand. It had been stuck into the window ledge, then turned on.

Now a ghostly, penetrating whisper seemed to fill all of the room. It came from nowhere and everywhere.

CHAPTER V
A GANG CAN'T SQUEAL

"THERE will be death for anyone who moves! Stay away from that desk! Place all the money that was to have been paid right there with those tickets!"

Dirk Thorton squealed, "The Whisperer! Over there by that window! I can see him!"

He could see the odd profile of The Whisperer. The long chin stuck out. The hair was a grayish blur. Being all gray, the remainder of The Whisperer's outline was indistinct.

Wart Dorgan shot again. This time his bullets brought a hissing of pain. The Whisperer had taken two bullets, one through the flesh of his left arm and the other nipping through his hair.

He uttered no further threat. But from both of his hands came strange, hissing blazes. They might have been created by the spurting blue flame of acetylene welding torches, for all the noise they made. They were The Whisperer's own effectively silenced guns.

Those pistols made hardly more than the sibilant whispering that was the fantastic voice of this underworld menace. One of Dirk Thorton's hard guys screamed. Two others had not the power to utter a sound.

Three bodies fell, two blocking the stairway exit that had been revealed under the mahogany desk. But two men already had passed into that stairway. Wart Dorgan and one other man still on his feet lost their nerve.

The heavy draperies swayed. Wart Dorgan and his companions were on their way downstairs.

The Whisperer could hear one of the fallen men breathing heavily. He knelt over this man.

"The money—all of the money for those tickets on the desk?" he hissed into the wounded man's ear. "Tell me, or I'll finish you off!"

"Secret drawer!" gasped the mobster. "Press the second button!"

"The man who brought them?" demanded The Whisperer. "Who is he? Is he—-"

The Whisperer ended his question. One hand was supporting the wounded man's head. The support was no longer needed. The mobster, one of Dirk Thorton's bodyguards, was dead.

THE WHISPERER could hear the shouting from below, the rushing of feet. Some were bringing flashlights from cars. The Whisperer did not linger. The bundles of blue tickets went under his coat.

From the drawer of Dirk Thorton's desk came the money that probably was to have been paid for those tickets. Then The Whisperer backed to the window through which he had come.

County police had been quickly informed of the

apparent holdup. Like all other rats, some of the Dirk Thorton crowd were quick enough to call on the police when some other crook menaced their lives or their goods.

A flashlight beam shot into the flower-filled room. Its beam revealed two dead men lying near each other. The third man hit by The Whisperer had apparently made his getaway.

Men with guns in their hands filled three doorways leading into Dirk Thorton's perfumed office. The Whisperer had shoved a body to one side and was descending a musty stone stairway. He proceeded cautiously, though he imagined that Dirk Thorton and the unidentified visitor would not tarry long enough to become a danger.

The Whisperer discovered he was in a dripping tunnel of rock under a hill. At one place this had been hollowed into a cavernous room.

The Whisperer could feel rather than see the space. He moved on his grip-soled shoes, making no sound. He judged that using a flashlight would be foolhardy.

As he groped for an exit from this room, The Whisperer suddenly stumbled over a square box-like frame set in the floor. Without employing a light, he made a quick investigation. Forgetting the handicap of his dental plates, he hissed several sharp oaths.

He was relieved when he found an exit through which cool, fresh air came in. For he had become aware that this cavern, reached by the tunnel from the gaming mansion, was a room of horrors—a murder room where the last shred of evidence, or a corpse would disappear.

Perhaps there had been a few cases of missing persons of which that room could tell if the moist, seeping walls could talk. There had been the odor of quicklime from the frame set in the floor.

As he reached the open air, The Whisperer discovered the reason why the entrance to the tunnel from the outside might never have been found. For he was in water to his knees. He had come out into a duck blind situated on the shore of a private hunting lake.

Perhaps half a mile away, The Whisperer could hear shouting around the Dirk Thorton gaming mansion. Yet he reached his own roadster undiscovered. Less than five minutes later, this small car was showing red headlights. It flashed into the congested traffic about Dirk Thorton's gambling palace with its siren screaming.

A captain of the county police walked over.

Wearing a broad grin, his Army hat cocked over one eye, his red carnation and equally red necktie setting off his loud blue suit, Police Commissioner Wildcat Gordon came from the roadster. The county captain did not notice he held one arm stiffly, where it had been wounded.

"What's coming off here?" said Wildcat, cheerfully. "It's getting so a policeman can't even go for a ride in the country without running onto some kind of trouble."

The county captain explained there had apparently been a fight between guests of Dirk Thorton. They had found bloodstains in the flower-filled office upstairs, but apparently the wounded persons had been able to walk away or had been removed.

"They'll probably turn up with some cockeyed story about how the county police shot them up," smiled Wildcat Gordon. "You ought to put the lid on this dump, captain."

The county captain smiled ruefully, and spoke with disgust.

"You don't know county politics, commissioner. I'd close the rotten joint tonight, but jobs are rather scarce for a police captain who might be asked to resign."

"No, I don't know county politics, captain," grinned Wildcat. "I have too many headaches to branch out."

AN hour later, Tiny Traeger tossed her fluffy, brown curls,

"When you take your feet off my table, Wildcat, I'll pour you some hot coffee," she said loftily. "So you got that bump on the head opening a door downstairs? And I suppose you ran an ice pick through your arm? I'm pouring some iodine right through that wound, and I hope it raises your hair!"

Old Quick Trigger smiled seriously. Tiny knew nothing of Wildcat's adventures as The Whisperer. She only imagined that as a police commissioner he was prowling into too many places he shouldn't be.

"Perhaps you ought to have stayed in the Army, Wildcat," said the doll-like girl, trying to keep from showing what she really thought of Wildcat. "But I suppose if you'd stayed, they'd have started a couple of wars, or you would."

When he had Tiny out of the way, Wildcat produced a roll of bills.

"It's something more than eight thousand, Quick Trigger," he stated. "You'll see that Molly O'Rourke gets it. The way I figure it, this is just a part of the blood money that took Tim away from Molly and the kid. And we're going to that Harton-Trador game on Friday."

"I wish I'd never made those crazy dental plates for you, Wildcat," complained Trigger. "Headquarters called up. They've picked up a couple of Dirk Thorton's top gun boys out in a ditch. Both of them had been shot through the throat. You wouldn't know anything about that, would you, Wildcat?"

"I know nothing whatever about any of Thorton's boys being put into a ditch," said Wildcat, solemnly. "But you get that money to Molly O'Rourke, and then we have some mailing to do."

THE little job of mailing was quite effective in some quarters. The results were especially irksome to Mayor Van Royston. His honor had boasted of buying six football tickets for friends and paying only twelve dollars when the same tickets were going as high as twenty-five dollars.

Now some of Mayor Van Royston's closest friends were laughing at him. It seemed that some of Wildcat Gordon's letters must have been addressed especially to the mayor's friends and neighbors.

When Wildcat entered his office the morning of the Harton-Trador game, Mayor Van Royston was pacing up and down. He had even forgotten his silk hat. He wore morning stripes, but apparently he was of the opinion a lot of other persons should be wearing stripes of another variety.

"Look at this! Look at this!" he shouted as Wildcat appeared in the most glaring of his light-brown suits.

The mayor was waving a paper. It looked like a short letter.

The Whisperer uttered no further threat. But from his hands came strange, hissing blazes.

"Yes?" said Wildcat, meekly. "I can't help seeing it. What is it all about?"

"About?" shouted the mayor. "About my paying twelve dollars apiece for the Harton-Trador tickets! About the same kind of reserved seat tickets being dumped today by the hundreds! Dumped! Sent out in the mails with this kind of a note! And who do you suppose wrote this note to one of my best friends?"

Wildcat swung into his big chair and pushed his yellow shoes onto his desk. "I wouldn't know who wrote that note to your best friend," he said, calmly. "Who did? Suppose you let me read it, your honor?"

Shaking with rage, Mayor Van Royston handed Wildcat the sheet of paper. Gordon read it slowly.

> Please accept the enclosed reserved tickets to the Harton-Trador football game with my compliments. Perhaps tickets for the final big game of the season may be supplied, if you appreciate football.

"And look—look at that—at that!"

Mayor Van Royston was almost incoherent with anger. He pointed to the bottom of the note. The paper was signed only "The Whisperer."

"Now that's what I call a noble gesture," grinned Wildcat. "Perhaps The Whisperer was in the ticket racket. Maybe it didn't pan out so well."

Mayor Van Royston's round chin poked out. He glared at Wildcat.

"There were two gang murders committed last night, Commissioner Gordon!" he exploded. "I've got Deputy Bolton working on them! And what have you done about them, if anything?"

"If you are referring to that pair of dead rats they found in the gutter this morning, mayor," stated Wildcat, calmly "what would you do about them? Whoever bumped them off ought to get a medal, or be cited for special service to society."

Mayor Van Royston was an honest mayor. Elected on the reform ticket, he desired a clean city. But he had been society, not Army bred. Commissioner Wildcat Gordon was a great thorn in his side.

"You're not taking the right attitude for a police commissioner of a great city, Gordon," he stated.

"I saw Tim O'Rourke lying dead in an alley, with a hole in his throat!" snapped Wildcat. "You can believe The Whisperer had a hand in the killing, but when I get to the bottom of this football ticket racket, I'll give you another answer!"

MAYOR VAN ROYSTON seemed struck by another thought. He said he had forgotten a complaint that had come into the office this same morning.

"Stan Fortune, the broker, had his home safe robbed last night, Gordon, and one of his servants swears it's another Whisperer job. We cannot afford to ignore a complaint coming from a man of Fortune's standing."

"I get it," stated Wildcat. "Stan Fortune rates, does he? He tips off his friends to where three-dollar football tickets can be purchased for a mere twelve dollars. And The Whisperer robbed his safe last night."

Mayor Van Royston flared. An insult to his friend, he asserted, constituted an insult to himself.

But Wildcat Gordon had ceased to listen. He was thinking about the man he had not seen, the vanishing stranger who had delivered the block of tickets to Dirk Thorton's gambling mansion.

There was something else had cropped up early today. While the odds had held steadily on Harton to beat Trador, at three-to-one, it was strongly rumored that virtually all of the Harton money was being covered.

Wildcat decided he would personally see that game.

MAYOR VAN ROYSTON

CHAPTER VI
TWO FUMBLED PASSES

HARTON, up to this time, had been the favorite for the championship. In four games, the Harton goal line had not been crossed. More than fifty thousand persons packed the stands of the football stadium.

Tiny Traeger snuggled close to Wildcat Gordon and said, "You'll tell me all about what I don't understand, won't you, Wildcat?"

"Hellamighty!" growled Wildcat. "Stay over on your own chair and act like you're grown up for once!"

Wildcat was watching several men in Mayor Van Royston's box. He had no difficulty picking out Stan Fortune with his high-and-mighty manner. Stan Fortune might have passed as one of foreign nobility, if he had not been born in Michigan. He had pinched nose glasses, a high forehead and a perpetually sneering mouth.

So Stan Fortune had complained of having his safe robbed by The Whisperer?

Wildcat liked football for the game itself. But underneath all the massed cheering and the music of the bands, he could detect a sinister note. What was it? His mind kept reverting to Tim O'Rourke lying dead in an alley, trying to write the name Thorton with the blood from his throat.

Wildcat spotted Dirk Thorton in a box not far from the mayor. A huge thug-ugly, with a wart on his nose, sat beside Thorton. Wildcat was well aware this was the same man who had put the bullet through The Whisperer's arm. Messengers came and went from the Dirk Thorton box.

Thorton was buying buttonhole bouquets. Wildcat saw him buy three from a stand vendor, then slowly tear the flowers to bits. The game was in the first quarter then. At the end of this it was 0-0.

The roar from the stands was a good indication that the smoothly timed Harton football machine was a heavy favorite. It was also evident where most of the money had been placed at three-to-one.

Wildcat Gordon revolved in his mind the report that much of the Harton money had been covered through various bettings spots. And this failed to check up with the contest then going on.

True, the Harton eleven hadn't scored in the first quarter. But the Trador goal was saved several

times only by a scant margin. Harton's ground-gaining play seemed to leave no doubt of the ultimate outcome.

When any football machine doubles its opponent in advancing the ball, it is only a question of time until the opposing goal is crossed.

The crowd expected Harton to score in the second quarter. Sports announcers megaphoned the prediction. At one such announcement, a pretty girl in a seat close to Tiny Traeger cried out.

"Show them this time, Bulldog!"

A handsome youth with a rugged face turned toward the girl from among the Trador players. He whirled his helmet, as if to say, "I'll show 'em!"

The pretty girl smiled. She had an oval face, a blue-black bob and gray eyes. Tiny Traeger said to Wildcat, "Who is she?"

"Donna Madring," replied Wildcat promptly, too promptly to suit Tiny. "Anyone who reads the society pages would know her."

"Huh!" sniffed Tiny. "So you know her from reading the society pages? She has been watching you, but maybe that's only because of your blue suit and that fire-alarm necktie!"

Wildcat grinned and said, "That's Bulldog Knox, the Trador quarterback, she called out to. They're to be married, or so the sporting pages assert."

TWO minutes after the whistle for the second quarter, it became apparent something had gone wrong with the oiled smoothness of the Harton eleven. Distance gains were still ahead of Trador, but Harton seemed to have slowed up. Twice the Harton goal was threatened on forward passes.

Each time it was this "Bulldog" Knox who took the throw and carried the leather. His second foray through the Harton defense carried him to within ten yards of the Harton goal. Perhaps the presence of the pretty Donna Madring had something to do with his furious playing.

That second quarter kept the crowd on its toes. Wildcat Gordon divided his attention between three spots: the play, the box in which Stan Fortune was sitting with Mayor Van Royston, and the box where the beady-eyed Dirk Thorton continued to scatter gardenia petals from his nervous fingers.

Wildcat's attention to the game suddenly began to center upon the notable Jack McGregor. In the first quarter, McGregor's flashing speed had been responsible for gains. In this second period it appeared that McGregor had become a bit sluggish.

Twice McGregor failed to get in the clear to receive signaled passes. Each time a deep groan went up from the stands. It was plain McGregor was the idol of the fans. Once Wildcat heard a scornful laugh at Jack McGregor's expense.

He turned just in time to see Donna Madring's red lips twisted into a sound of derision. Well, smiled Wildcat, you could not blame a girl for favoring her own sweetheart. Bulldog Knox's speed was beginning to upset the Harton sureness. Trador managed to break up scheduled passes.

At the end of the second quarter the score still stood 0-0. Wildcat observed the Harton coach call Jack McGregor to one side as the weary players went to their rooms at the close of the half. Clearly the coach was questioning the brilliant McGregor.

Wildcat could see that McGregor's teammates had lost confidence in their star. Their side glances at the quarterback were like muttered words. Wildcat happened to be watching Dirk Thorton. The small, beady-eyed man was smiling. He was buying some more flowers.

The heavy-faced Wart Dorgan was wearing an evil grin. In the box of Mayor Van Royston, Stan Fortune appeared to be in high spirits. Perhaps he had a side bet on the game.

THE game seesawed through the third quarter without a score. It went into the last period. In the breathing spell, Wildcat saw the Harton coach talking with Jack McGregor, his hands waving peremptorily. The coach had received permission to talk to his player. McGregor's performance had remained sluggish.

Now the game was in the last few minutes of play. Harton had advanced the ball halfway down the field on the third down. Wildcat, who knew every movement of the game, caught the signal for the forward pass.

Wildcat's colorless eyes flashed to the box where Dirk Thorton was sitting. He could see the beady-eyed little man was leaning forward. His gaze seemed fixed upon one player.

Then Wildcat caught it. Jack McGregor's begrimed young face was turned for an instant toward the boxes. The formation was on the side, close to where Wildcat and the Traegers were sitting.

Had Jack McGregor given a slight nod? Was it something more than the tenseness of an evenly played game that had put the strained, desperate look on his suddenly hard features?

The signal came; the players shifted. Trador could tell the pass was coming. It was Harton's ball on Trador's thirty-yard line. A completed pass called for determined defense.

Jack McGregor flashed from the formation with a speed he had not before displayed. Interference removed all but one man of the Trador defense. The ball lofted high and straight into the clear spot toward which McGregor was headed.

At this moment, Wildcat Gordon was close enough to read the expression on McGregor's face.

The quarterback's hands were in place to receive the pass. Only a few yards remained to the Trador goal line, with but one man to pass. And two Harton front linemen were already smashing down upon this last possible defense.

Wildcat did not miss a single movement of Jack McGregor. The leather dropped squarely into his hands. And the brilliant speedster of the conquering Harton eleven seemed to catch his toe and fumble the ball at the same time.

The ball bounded away, and a Trador man fell upon it.

A concerted groan went up from the stands. Wildcat could hear the pretty Donna Madring squeal with delight. The ball had gone to Trador. It now was Bulldog Knox's turn.

Wildcat Gordon remained motionless. Every vestige of humor went out of his square, rugged face. Perhaps no other eyes in all of the stands had been keen enough to detect what had really taken place.

For at the moment Jack McGregor had fumbled what should have been a certain touchdown, McGregor had twisted his head. He had shot a furtive glance at the box in which sat Dirk Thorton and his bodyguards. And Wildcat had glimpsed a passing expression of fear on McGregor's face.

"Four minutes left," said Wildcat to Quick Trigger. "If there is another Harton pass, keep your eyes on McGregor."

FOR a brief interval it seemed as if there would be no opportunity to continue watching Jack McGregor. The Harton coach had ordered a substitute back to get out of his sweater. McGregor must have seen this. He shook his head stubbornly.

The coach changed his mind. It did not seem as if Harton would be able to stop the Trador march down the field and regain the ball in that final few minutes. But Harton's resistance was stubborn. Trador stood to fail on a fourth down, and Bulldog Knox, the standby, was cut down before he could receive an attempted pass.

The ball went back to Harton. Wildcat glanced at his watch. He saw there was less than a minute to play. A long pass was Harton's only chance to break that tying score.

The Harton machine snapped into fast action. Suddenly Jack McGregor seemed to be moving with incredible feet. That final pass of the game centered around McGregor. Again the speedy quarterback came shooting down the sideline, close to Wildcat Gordon's seat.

This time, Wildcat was set to miss nothing of the quarterback's movement. A fumbled pass now would end all of Harton's chances. The stands roared with thundering voices. The players had used a new shift on that last possible pass.

Wildcat got his Texas eyes on the neatly curving ball. The oval was dropping for the second time directly into McGregor's hands.

Once more, Wildcat saw the strained face of the quarterback turn toward Dirk Thorton's box. There was a snapping shake of McGregor's helmeted head.

The ball struck the quarterback's hands. It bounded into the air. The stands started that final groan of condemnation. It seemed almost a miracle that Jack McGregor recovered his own fumble before it touched the ground.

Then the speedy quarterback was smashing forward. He had a clean forty yards to go. His interference failed at one point, and he was forced to shift his course.

Jack McGregor went over the Trador goal line standing up. As pandemonium broke loose throughout the stands, Wildcat Gordon was watching the Dirk Thorton box.

Wart Dorgan and two other men had reared to their feet. They were pushing their way back through the crowd.

JACK McGREGOR was lifted to the shoulders of a surging mob and paraded before the stands toward the shower rooms. Harton was still the

"TINY" TRAEGER

undefeated eleven with the uncrossed goal line.

Wildcat Gordon saw Donna Madring patting one of Bulldog Knox's padded shoulders. The pretty society girl kissed the Trador quarterback's dirt-streaked face for all the world to see. Wildcat did not notice that Tiny Traeger was looking at the pair as if she had ideas.

"Get Tiny home, Quick Trigger!" snapped Wildcat. "I've got fast business! I have a hunch we have just witnessed what is known as the old double-cross by a football player too honest inside to finish something he started! And that means there'll be hell to pay!"

Wildcat Gordon passed in front of Mayor Van Royston's box. He had a glimpse of the glowering face of Stan Fortune. So Fortune did not fancy the outcome of the game so much, was Wildcat's thought.

Wildcat was delayed several minutes getting into the Harton shower room. He wanted to get in touch with Jack McGregor. He had the feeling that McGregor might be permitted to get out of the crowd unharmed, and he might not.

Almost anything can happen in a crowd.

Wildcat pushed into the shower room. Other Harton players were jubilating, pulling off their uniforms. Wildcat made a quick inquiry.

"You want to see McGregor, Commissioner Gordon," said the Harton coach. "That's too bad. McGregor wanted to avoid the crowd, I guess. He pulled on a coat over his uniform and said he would change at his hotel. There was a car waiting for him."

The November dusk made it dark when Wildcat got outside. Some minutes were wasted in getting his own roadster out of the tangled parking lot. Then the police siren cleared the way toward a hotel situated several miles across town.

"If I'm only in time!" gritted Wildcat.

CHAPTER VII
DEATH FOR HONOR

WILDCAT GORDON'S car ceased sirening several blocks from the uptown hotel where Jack McGregor was staying. Less than ten minutes later, the gorgeous raiment of the police commissioner had resolved itself into the gray, monotonous clothing and coloring of The Whisperer.

The gray-clad Whisperer, with his pointed chin and upper lip made longer by the queer dental plates, ascended the service stairs of the first-rate hotel.

He moved lithely, his noiseless feet taking several stairs at a time. At this hour in the evening it was easy to evade attaches of the hotel.

The Whisperer had learned Jack McGregor was occupying Room 1010. The tenth-floor corridor was deserted when The Whisperer soft-footed through it.

He was hoping to reach Jack McGregor's room undetected. For Wildcat Gordon had a direct belief some other place would be far safer tonight for the flashing quarterback of Harton.

The Whisperer was only four doors from 1010. The silence of the corridor indicated he must be in time. Perhaps McGregor had fled directly to his hotel for the purpose of moving to some other spot. That would have been the wisest action, The Whisperer judged.

The corridor was well lighted. The Whisperer made no effort to conceal his movements here. Had anyone encountered him, his gray attire had converted him into an inconspicuous figure, one of several thousand such average men in the city.

A door opened suddenly directly behind him. The Whisperer heard the soft rush of feet, a staccato bark of a dog. As he turned, a fluffy poodle was hurling itself toward his heels. A queer smile came over The Whisperer's odd countenance.

The eerie, whispering voice, resulting from his dental plates, always had a remarkable effect upon animals. So The Whisperer spoke in his sibilant, penetrating whisper. The poodle ceased instantly to bark and no longer showed an inclination to snap at the legs of the man in gray.

The little dog bellied toward The Whisperer's feet. From the door of the room where the animal had emerged, came a woman's strident voice.

The woman was large and wore blue ear pendants. Her soft, white hands were held up as if she were shocked that anyone should touch her precious poodle.

But she had heard the whispering, hissing voice of the man in gray. She had seen his blur of hair and his oddly shaped jaw and long upper lip.

The small dog obeyed her command and ran back into the room. The door slammed. The Whisperer looked at the numbers. This woman with the dog occupied number 1008. Two doors away was 1010, occupied by Jack McGregor.

It might have seemed to the woman that The Whisperer had come from Jack McGregor's room. But he was moving toward it. He was in the act of trying the knob when an elevator stopped. From this came half a dozen men. They looked as if they had seen a ghost, and this apparently had nothing to do with the presence of The Whisperer.

THE WHISPERER moved aside. The men were converging upon the room occupied by Jack McGregor. The Whisperer's hands slipped to his hissing automatics, but he did not draw them. For one of the men proved he belonged to the hotel staff.

"He couldn't have been drunk, for he just came from the game!" one man was saying, excitedly. "Why, he hadn't even changed clothes or taken a bath! The window screen was broken out, for part of it fell with him!"

The Whisperer was moving away along the corridor. He walked calmly away, jiggling keys in his hand as if he had just come from one of the rooms. He hoped the arriving men had not had too clear a view of his strange face.

The men who had come upstairs were too intent upon reaching the room of Jack McGregor to pay much attention to an apparent guest walking along the corridor.

The Whisperer reached the backstairs on the floor below. Between the ninth and the eighth floor, a quick change took place.

Three or four minutes later, Police Commissioner Wildcat Gordon used his authority to push through the crowd surrounding a gruesome object on the sidewalk. The body of Jack McGregor was terribly broken. His figure had struck an awning part way down, but it had fallen all of the ten stories.

Two patrolmen were standing by the body, waiting for the medical examiner. They saluted the commissioner as he bent over the shattered, bloody body. The head was so smashed that Wildcat could not determine what fear might have been in Jack McGregor's eyes.

Wildcat's mind was asking fast questions. Had McGregor done this thing himself? Had he feared exposure of an intention to throw the Harton-Trador game?

Wildcat's deft hands ran over the body. The torn corner of a small bit of green paper protruded between the fingers of one bloody hand. Concealing his action from the two patrolmen, just before a squad car and an ambulance arrived, Wildcat removed this paper.

It was the torn half of a hundred-dollar bill.

Five minutes later, Wildcat Gordon was in Jack McGregor's room. The screen of a window had been pushed out. Otherwise, the room of the dead football star was all in order. For some time the word was spread that Jack McGregor must have jumped or fallen from his window.

The medical examiner called Wildcat Gordon to one side.

"I might have missed it, but I didn't, chief," he stated. "The boy was not killed by the fall! He had a bullet in his heart that had entered from the back! The fingerprint boys haven't found anything on the body or in the room?"

"They haven't found anything," said Wildcat.

He fingered the torn scrap of hundred-dollar bill in his pocket. He was convinced there had been other bank notes, either on Jack McGregor or in the room. There were none now.

OUTSIDE, in the tenth-floor corridor, the large woman with the blue earrings was talking to Deputy Commissioner Henry Bolton.

"He whispered at my dog!" she was explaining, excitedly. "He had just come out of that room there! My Fifi is smart and tried to bite him! But when he whispered, Fifi was scared!"

Deputy Bolton muttered an oath and added, "The Whisperer is in this thing! But why this Jack McGregor?"

Two plainclothes men had just come up on the elevator.

"It may or may not have been The Whisperer," said one of the detectives to Deputy Bolton. "But there's something screwy about that football game this afternoon. Somebody bumped off that cheap, tinhorn gambler, One-Eye Mugger, about an hour ago."

"Yes? Yes?" said Deputy Bolton, as Wildcat Gordon came from Jack McGregor's room into the corridor.

"They got One-Eye Mugger?" questioned Wildcat.

One of the detectives affirmed the report. Their brief investigation led them to believe "One-Eye" Mugger, a cheap gambler, had plunged heavily on the short end of the Harton-Trador game. When the pay-off came up, One-Eye Mugger had failed to produce the cash.

The detectives believed some of his sucker customers had got him. Wildcat Gordon was not so sure about that. He had ascertained some huge sums of money had been invested in the short end of that Harton-Trador game.

Almost before the murder investigation had been concluded at the hotel where Jack McGregor died, some of the yellow press was attempting to build up a football scandal. Several sporting editors had recalled Jack McGregor's first fumble in the fourth

quarter of the game. They had learned how the star player had hurried from the field after the game.

Among the more virulent of the writers, looking for sensational stuff, was a sporting editor known as Hopper Simes. This Hopper Simes had been keeping his columns snappy with accusations of unfairness in the college games.

But all of these stories lacked any other confirmation than the possible involving of Jack McGregor in some gambling scheme that had cost his life. The conservative newspapers eulogized the murdered player.

In the meantime, Wildcat Gordon was in the penthouse apartment of Quick Trigger. He had laid out half a dozen hundred-dollar bank notes on a table.

Quick Trigger's deep eyes scanned these notes and turned to the bloody fragment of a bill that Wildcat had taken from the hand of Jack McGregor.

"I reckon, Wildcat, even the smartest crooks slip up," said Quick Trigger. "Undoubtedly that torn bill is of the same series as the money you took from Barthold and that other money that was to have been paid for the football tickets. We could check up on their issue, and that would break the case."

Wildcat shook his head slowly.

"We could check up, but we'll let that rest awhile," he stated. "No doubt we could discover the bank of issue and the identity of the person receiving the money. This whole thing goes deeper than that.

"We might possibly get to Dirk Thorton, and still we would be overlooking the brain behind all of this. That crowd isn't going to stand the loss taken on this game, so we'll sit tight and see what happens."

COMMISSIONER WILDCAT GORDON had a shrewd sense of what would happen next. It came with a sudden cessation of conversation as he entered his office the following morning.

Wildcat made a good pretense of not noticing the sudden silence. The immaculate Stan Fortune was present with Mayor Van Royston. They had been talking with Deputy Commissioner Henry Bolton.

Detective Sergeant Thorsen sat at his desk, as usual, saying nothing. Mayor Van Royston cleared his throat up to a lead as Wildcat wished his visitors a cheery good morning.

"It is far from a good morning, Commissioner Gordon!" declared Mayor Van Royston. "Several times it seems this department with all of its facilities could have caught this notorious, murdering Whisperer! My friend, Mr. Fortune, is preparing to put the whole matter before the reform committee, unless we get immediate action!"

Wildcat's colorless eyes moved slowly over to Stan Fortune. They took in the pinching nose glasses, the perpetually sneering mouth and the high-and-mighty lift of the man's head.

Stan Fortune looked at Wildcat's loud raiment as if he would have liked to consign the commissioner's red necktie and his yellow shoes to the garbage can.

"When our fair city becomes unsafe for the conduct of clean, manly sport because of the failure of its police department, it is high time a shaking up was brought about," said Stan Fortune in his overtired voice.

"So you've elected yourself to start the shaking up, is that it, Mr. Fortune?" inquired Wildcat, almost gently.

"Someone has to assist our worthy mayor in bringing the truth to the attention of the party committee which seems to have selected you as head of our police," said Stan Fortune. "I admit, that I seldom care to become involved in vulgar matters of this character, but the murder of a football player puts a stigma upon our city and the name of sport which I cannot overlook."

Wildcat Gordon plucked a red petal from his buttonhole carnation and flicked it with a careless forefinger in the direction of the dignified Stan Fortune. His voice was abruptly edged and hard.

"You can get the hell out of my office, Mr. Fortune!" he snapped. "And while you play around with the reform committee, I'll look after the stigmas around here! By the way, how much did you drop on yesterday's game?"

Mayor Van Royston's mouth flopped open. His round chin tried to hide under his shirt collar. Sergeant Thorsen's square, wooden face showed a narrow slit under his nose, which was the nearest he ever came to smiling.

Only the small eyes of Deputy Henry Bolton held a real smile. He had been expecting for a long time that Wildcat Gordon would go too far. With the standing and influence of Stan Fortune, the broker, it seemed to Henry Bolton the time had arrived.

Stan Fortune started to speak, changed his mind, and walked from the office. Mayor Van Royston fixed Wildcat Gordon with a frozen look.

"That insult probably will cost you the job of commissioner, Gordon," said the mayor. "You can't ask questions like that and order prominent citizens from your office."

"I can ask any question I choose and order the governor of the State from my office!" rapped Wildcat, coming to his feet. "When you follow Fortune, you might ask him what he knows about the story printed this morning in the column of

that yellow sporting editor, Hopper Simes. Now I've got business on my hands!"

Wildcat sat down again. He took a clipping from a morning newspaper. It was the sporting column conducted by Hopper Simes.

CHAPTER VIII
MURDER IN THE STORM

HOPPER SIMES, dignified by the name of sporting editor, could hardly be classed with the hardworking rank and file of newspapermen. The paper employing him played to cheap sensation. Hopper Simes had a scurrilous touch to his column.

Wildcat Gordon studied the item in Hopper Simes' column and tried to read between the lines.

> TIME TO CLEAN UP COLLEGE FOOTBALL
>
> The brutal murder of Jack McGregor, of the Harton eleven, brings to light the crookedness which has been underlying college football for a long time. With the removal of McGregor, Harton's chances to capture the championship are considerably lessened.
>
> The showing of Trador yesterday indicated this eleven may be counted upon to take the lead over the disrupted Harton squad. In this connection, Bulldog Knox will be brought into the limelight.
>
> At this time, it might be well to ascertain by what influence Bulldog Knox is retained on the Trador team. It has long been suspected that Bulldog Knox is more of a "hired man" than a legitimate student.
>
> It might be well to discover if Knox is Bulldog's real name, especially as he is reported to be using his football reputation in a certain matter of the heart. It may be mentioned that the Madrings are one of the first families of the city.

There was more, which Wildcat Gordon read with suppressed oaths. The police commissioner knew something about Bulldog Knox. It was true, as Hopper Simes had put it, that Knox was a "hired man." But he was a legitimate student, employed at jobs whereby he could work his way through college. The Hopper Simes attack was clearly a libel against a hardworking, honest youngster, but phrased in such a manner as to leave Bulldog Knox virtually without defense.

IT was a week ago today that the Harton-Trador game had been played. This afternoon State and Trador would battle for the glory that had once been Harton's—the chance for the championship.

Wildcat folded the newspaper item and placed it in a pocket. He walked over to Sergeant Thorsen's desk.

"You will send out a special detail to today's game between Trador and State," he instructed. "From the moment Bulldog Knox appears, I want him kept in sight. If Hopper Simes attends the game, which he probably will, put two men on him until the crowd has cleared away."

Though he took this mysterious precaution, Wildcat Gordon did not receive his direct report of the afternoon's game from Sergeant Thorsen or his men. He learned only that immediately after Trador had taken a defeat from State, both Hopper Simes and Bulldog Knox had disappeared.

IT was several hours after the game, in Quick Trigger's penthouse, that Wildcat got his additional information.

"Sure," said old Quick Trigger, "I took in the game. State walked all over Trador, but they wouldn't have if Bulldog Knox had been on his toes. The youngster dragged through the game as if he was slug nutty. I guess watchin' Hopper Simes celebratin' in a box with friends didn't help Knox's game any."

"Hopper Simes was celebrating, eh?" said Wildcat. "Seemed to have money, did he?"

"I reckon few sporting editors ever scattered as much as he did this afternoon," said Quick Trigger. "I just happened to learn, accidentally, that Hopper Simes is putting on a party out at the Red Rooster road house on the Ocean Turnpike, tonight, and he had some hard-looking dame with him. She reminded me of someone I used to know."

Wildcat Gordon used the telephone for a few minutes. When he ended his conversation, he had learned that some important money had changed hands on the Trador-State game. With Trador on the long end at the opening of the betting, the wise ones had made a cleaning on State's unexpected win.

And Hopper Simes was plentifully supplied with money.

Wildcat could judge the morning column would have thrown Bulldog Knox off his stride. Perhaps that was all that had been intended. Or was some bigger play being made by the gambling element?

Sergeant Thorsen reported his men had lost Bulldog Knox. But the detectives had again picked up Hopper Simes.

"When they report, have the boys drop him cold!" ordered Wildcat. "I understand Hopper Simes is throwing a party tonight! I don't want his style hampered in any way!"

HOPPER SIMES did not seem to be hampered in his wild style of celebrating at the Red Rooster road house. Any judge of character would have known the scurrilous sport columnist was unaccustomed to having money in any amount.

Hopper Simes was very drunk and very noisy. He scattered a few hundred-dollar bills as if he had

a direct lead into the mint. The more he drank, the more offensive he became. He got up on a table and made a speech.

In this, he followed up his story of the morning. His excoriation of college football and Bulldog Knox caused even the hard-boiled manager of the Red Rooster to have him taken from the table.

Wrapped in his own conceit and fogged with liquor, Hopper Simes paid little attention to other guests in the road house. He missed a little, gray-clad man sipping a soda and scotch at a corner table. The man in gray was of the average type that would be overlooked at any noisy gathering.

Though he was the much hunted Whisperer, it is doubtful if any of those who had ever seen him could have identified him. For the fine art of Wildcat Gordon's odd disguise was its lack of any outstanding feature, as long as he was not compelled to employ his awe-inspiring, whispering voice.

Now while Hopper Simes overlooked the presence of the little gray man in the corner, The Whisperer overlooked nothing. At the moment Hopper Simes was on the table uttering his vile abuse of college football and Bulldog Knox, The Whisperer had seen the soft opening of a side door.

And this moment, The Whisperer had located the road house light switch. When he saw the white, angry face and the blazing eyes of Bulldog Knox appear at the door, The Whisperer was prepared in the next few seconds to cut out the lights.

For this was exactly what he had been expecting. He had judged that in some manner Bulldog Knox was to be removed from the Trador lineup. The Whisperer was to discover he was incorrect in this.

Bulldog Knox was pushing through the door. A slender, white hand caught the football player's shoulder. The pretty, oval face of Donna Madring appeared. The girl's curved mouth was close to Bulldog's ear, and she seemed to be whispering.

Bulldog Knox must have held the highest regard for this society girl. At this moment, no doubt, he had intended mopping up the roadhouse room with the abusive Hopper Simes. But he heeded the plea of Donna Madring, whatever it was.

The Whisperer saw the door slowly close. Then he heard a car start outside.

Following his vitriolic speech, Hopper Simes sunk his fat chin on his breast and slept drunkenly. Perhaps ten minutes after Bulldog Knox had come and gone, a waiter shook Hopper Simes out of his coma.

The Whisperer's colorless eyes took in a woman standing just outside the front entrance. The woman was cloaked; a hood concealed her face. Rain glistened on the rubber material of the coat. A slashing autumn storm had broken. Lightning was flaring occasionally across the roadhouse windows.

Hopper Simes left his table companions and went out. In a minute, The Whisperer saw a waiter take Hopper Simes' coat and hat from the checkroom. Immediately after that, The Whisperer paid his bill and left the roadhouse by a side entrance.

The car being driven by Hopper Simes had been hired for the night or borrowed from some friend. It was too sleek a sedan to be the property of any sporting editor.

The Whisperer was in his small roadster when the sedan slid out onto the Ocean Turnpike in the slashing rain. A flare of lightning showed the vague form of a woman seated beside Hopper Simes. Perhaps because of his condition, the woman was driving.

The Whisperer conjectured that possibly she had come here for the sporting editor by some previous arrangement. He recalled what Quick Trigger had said about a hard-looking dame being with Hopper Simes at the football game. But The Whisperer had not been given a look at the face of this woman.

Hopper Simes in the sedan was a hundred yards up the Turnpike when The Whisperer slid the roadster onto the tail of the other car. The Simes car turned into a softer, unpaved road about a mile from the Red Rooster road house. Its red light flicked around a curve.

At that instant, there was a blinding flash inside The Whisperer's roadster. The rainstorm had short-circuited a wire, and the ignition had been killed along with the lights.

The Whisperer swore volubly, digging out the necessary repair tools. He was perhaps ten minutes locating the shorted wire. He had twisted it together, working with a flashlight when he heard the quick explosion of another motor.

The headlights of a car flashed around the curve in the unpaved road. A flare of lightning showed the car to be small, of the coupe type. It was being driven at reckless speed on that slippery road.

The Whisperer's car lights were still out. He crouched beside the road, waiting for the other car to pass. There came a vivid blue flash of lightning and a pealing crack of thunder. It was as if a spotlight had been thrown upon the windshield of the coupe as it passed.

A girl was driving. There was an instant's showing of the lovely face of Donna Madring. Lying against her shoulder was the rough, hair-matted head of Bulldog Knox.

The Whisperer had this brief glimpse, then the lightning was over. The coupe skidded into the Ocean Turnpike and roared away toward the city.

HAD The Whisperer not been delayed by faulty ignition, he probably would have witnessed a fight in the rain on the muddy road. For the coupe containing

Bulldog Knox and Donna Madring had been waiting under a tree just off the Ocean Turnpike.

Less than a mile from the turnpike, the sedan in which Hopper Simes was riding with a woman was suddenly in the headlight beams of a car coming from behind.

Though the woman in the sedan was a skillful driver, the car following came up with such speed and recklessness that the sedan was crowded to the ditch.

Donna Madring swung the coupe abruptly across the road. The cars crashed slightly, and the sedan spun around. The husky Bulldog Knox came from the coupe.

Somewhat sobered by the rain and the drive, Hopper Simes stuck his head from the door window and yelled, "What the hell do you mean, skiddin' us off the road?"

Bulldog Knox laughed harshly. Behind him the dainty figure of Donna Madring came through the mud. She caught Bulldog's arm, but he shook her off roughly.

"You ask me what I want!" grunted Bulldog Knox.

The next instant, Hopper Simes was flying, headfirst, from the door of his sedan, his ears gripped by ruthless hands. Bulldog Knox was fast as grease.

He managed to let go of one of Hopper Simes' ears and smash him squarely on the nose with a fist before Hopper Simes sloshed into the mud.

Despite this initial advantage, Hopper Simes outweighed Bulldog Knox by many pounds, and he was fast. Also, he had been completely sobered by the rough treatment. He came to his feet, snarling and swinging.

Bulldog Knox slipped in the mud, and at the same time took a clout in the stomach from one of Hopper Simes' swinging fists. Both men rolled out into the road.

Donna Madring was white-faced, but silent. The woman who had been with Hopper Simes in the sedan appeared to wish no part of the battle in the rain.

She slipped from her car and crossed to a stone fence. Donna Madring was watching the two men on the ground. She did not see the woman climb the stones and remain crouching there.

Bulldog Knox and Hopper Simes staggered to their feet together. Their fists were still swinging. Donna Madring was holding a flashlight in one hand, as if to give illumination to the weird fistic encounter in the rain.

Suddenly Hopper Simes swore obscenely and backed away from Bulldog's punching knuckles. His hand went inside his coat and came out with a gleam of blue steel. Then Donna Madring cried out shrilly.

"Bulldog! Look out! He's got a gun!"

Bulldog Knox was not quick enough to get out of line with Hopper Simes' hand. The pistol flashed up. But that same instant the society darling of the tabloids became only a woman defending her man.

She sprang directly toward Hopper Simes, striking with the flashlight. The heavy metal and glass lens cut directly down between Hopper Simes' eyes.

The man's pistol flew from his hand and he flung out both hands, falling to his knees. Bulldog Knox was wiping the blood from his mouth.

"Please, Bulldog, please!" screamed Donna Madring. "I've killed him! Come on!"

Their coupe had been swung around by the impact with the other car. Bulldog Knox probably was a little dazed by Hopper Simes's fists. He got into the coupe with Donna Madring and the little car shot along the muddy road, returning in the direction it had come.

HAD Bulldog Knox or Donna Madring turned to look back, they might have seen a cloaked woman climb to the top of the stone fence. A flashlight was flicked on and off several times.

A darkened, closed car must have been waiting not far away. For headlights flashed on and an automobile glided to the side of the ditched sedan. It might have been seen that this mysterious car remained on the scene less than two minutes. Then it was turned and headed back in the direction from which it had come.

About this time, having got his ignition working, The Whisperer sent his roadster skidding in the mud of the unpaved road. He stopped with a squealing of brakes. Only by jamming the pedal was he able to avoid running over the body of a man lying in the muddy road.

The Whisperer slapped into the mud and turned the body over. He was looking at the bloody, battered face of Hopper Simes. The scurrilous sporting editor had written his final column. His eyes were glazed and he was dead.

CHAPTER IX
EYES IN THE HEADLIGHT

THE WHISPERER used his own flashlight. The headlamps of the ditched sedan had been turned off. The pencil beam revealed that Hopper Simes had taken a stiff beating before the fatal blow was struck.

The Whisperer avoided making too many tracks in the soft road. He especially examined the evidence that two automobiles besides the ditched sedan had visited the scene.

A hissing oath came from his lips as he noted the

two additional cars had come to this spot, then turned back the way they had come.

Only the one car, Bulldog Knox's coupe, had passed in the direction of the Red Rooster road house. The other car must have come from the city and, after the discovery of Hopper Simes' body, turned back.

Hopper Simes' face was badly battered. His nose had been broken. A deep, bloody gash showed between his eyes. The Whisperer picked up a broken flashlight. The metal had bloody hair clinging to it.

Another small object was shining in the road. This was a small compact of gold, such as a girl of wealth would carry. The Whisperer wrapped the flashlight carefully to retain any fingerprints.

The blow struck by the flashlight had been cruelly hard. It had cut the dead man's forehead to the

Bulldog Knox was not quick enough to get out of line with Hopper Simes' hand. The pistol flashed up.

bone. A bit of white fluttered in the mud. This was a girl's lacy handkerchief, with a delicate perfume scenting it.

Hopper Simes' knuckles were cut and bruised. The Whisperer gave close attention to the body and the wounds. His quick hands probed every head injury, with the skill of a surgeon. Last of all, he ran his fingertips along the base of Hopper Simes' skull.

Arising, The Whisperer devoted a couple of minutes to tracing the several tracks in the soft road. He followed those of the two cars, marking which had been the last to turn across those made by the other.

Suddenly he bent close. He was looking at the prints made by the feet of Hopper Simes before he had died. These were mingled with many other tracks, at the spot where the fistic battle had been staged.

But there was something even more significant about those footprints. So important that The Whisperer hastily produced a flat camera with a special flashbulb from inside his clothes. There was a dazzling flare and the camera clicked, its lens taking in the recumbent corpse and the footprints closest to it.

"So he was robbed," said The Whisperer softly to himself. "His money, his watch and a ring taken."

THE WHISPERER'S flashbulb as he had taken the picture had illuminated all of the patch of roadway, the dripping trees in the rain around it. Now, as The Whisperer continued his movements, none would have known he had become aware of a startling fact.

His camera flashbulb had momentarily revealed glowing eyes. These sinister, watching orbs were over by the stone fence beyond the ditched sedan.

The Whisperer kept his hand flashlight playing slowly over the ground. Foot by foot, he was edging his way past the ditched sedan, closer to the stone fence. One hand had crept to one of his automatics equipped with the hissing silencers.

Close beside the sedan, The Whisperer paused and sucked in his breath. Tiny objects of vivid coloring appeared beside the car.

"That may give one answer," said The Whisperer, softly.

The tiny, colored objects went into an envelope. He was now past the ditched sedan. A quick leap, the flicking off of his light would put him over by the stone fence. He had fixed accurately the position of the watching eyes.

The Whisperer never made his intended surprise jump toward the stone fence. The staccato explosions of a motorcycle came simultaneously with the piercing beam of a single headlight rounding the curve in the rain.

The beam struck fully upon the gray figure of The Whisperer. The illumination jumped beyond. The Whisperer was given a camera flash view of a woman's face. An instantaneous, but complete picture that was photographed on his brain.

The woman's face was a hard mask, with the lips drawn back. In that brief vision, her bared teeth seemed to shine like suddenly exposed diamonds. Then the motorcycle beam swung past, caught the body of Hopper Simes in the muddy road.

The brake on the motorcycle squawled. The county patrolman let out a startled shout. His machine skidded in the mud as one of his hands reached for his gun. The presence of the lone man in gray told its own immediate story to the patrolman.

The motorcycle explosions ceased, but its headlight beam was on The Whisperer. The patrolman's shout was followed by a second of silence. Into that silence came a slight, hissing sound.

Bullets hammered into the headlight of the patrolman's motorcycle as the man dived suddenly from the seat. The Whisperer was shooting with care.

Stygian darkness engulfed the rainy night.

Though the patrolman shouted a command, another voice sounded above it. It was an eerie, penetrating whisper.

"Stay where you are! I don't want to kill you!"

The Whisperer was moving toward his roadster. He had a double reason for making a clean getaway. First, he had no desire to fall into the hands of the county policeman. That would have entailed possible disastrous explanations.

Second, he was fully aware that one more crime probably would be laid at the door of The Whisperer. He chuckled to himself as he started his little car and heard the county copper's bullets hammering into the rear end.

No doubt the fact that Hopper Simes had been beaten and then robbed would afford complications. Especially if an effort was made to lay the crime at the feet of Bulldog Knox.

The county patrolman emptied his gun after The Whisperer's car. Perhaps he would have pursued, but a motorcycle without a headlight afforded poor transportation for a chase in the rain. The Whisperer shot toward the city.

He drove with reckless speed. At the same time, he was attempting to put together several pieces of the murder puzzle. Why had the hard-looking woman remained watching beside the corpse?

He knew she had observed all of his movements. This, he was grimly aware, was putting him directly on the spot whatever this frame-up might turn out to be.

Was it the purpose to have Bulldog Knox accused

and thus removed from the Trador lineup in the coming decisive games of the closing season? If so, why had Hopper Simes been robbed of his money, his watch and a ring?

Then there had been the flashlight that had inflicted that gash in the dead man's forehead? It was covered with fingerprints, no doubt. Had it been left purposely for the police to discover?

THE answers to these and some other questions would come in due time. The Whisperer had no minutes now to be wasted. For less than twenty minutes after a county patrolman had been pouring bullets after The Whisperer's car, Commissioner Wildcat Gordon strolled nonchalantly into his office.

He was seated at his desk in all of his sartorial elegance, his Army hat cocked over one inscrutable, colorless eye when the news started breaking through the headquarters board.

Deputy Henry Bolton took the first information coming into the commissioner's office.

"I'm calling Mayor Van Royston!" he shouted. "The Whisperer has committed another murder! This time it can't be said it was only some crook he killed! He got Hopper Simes, the sporting editor, and four county patrolmen saw him leaving the scene!"

Wildcat Gordon wore a whimsical grin on his good-looking face. It was odd how much wrong information could be collected in a short time. Anyway, he did not care how many county coppers swore to having seen The Whisperer.

"Call the mayor by all means, Henry," he said to Deputy Bolton. "However, you say it's out in the county. So we won't have to stay up tonight worrying about it. Put special details on all highways leading into the city and see if The Whisperer can be picked up."

The raging Henry Bolton called Mayor Van Royston. Having established an almost perfect alibi, Wildcat Gordon drove rapidly from headquarters to his penthouse apartment. Summoning Quick Trigger, he placed several items of evidence on a table.

"But chiefly," stated Wildcat, "there was the woman with the hard face and the shining teeth. They looked like they were filled with platinum."

Old Quick Trigger seldom betrayed excitement. Now he jumped to his feet. "I've got it!" he shouted. "That's her, Platinum Nell! Nobody else, and I remember when she was playing moll to Wart Dorgan!"

"Which brings her right close up to Dirk Thorton and his crowd," stated Wildcat. "We'll wait now and see if the county police theory of The Whisperer is permitted to ride as it is. Quick Trigger, we are going to see a few football games in the coming few days."

"But all the evidence points to Bulldog Knox," said Quick Trigger.

CHAPTER X
THE MAD QUARTERBACK

WHATEVER Wildcat Gordon's thoughts might have been, his police department received no hint directing suspicion of murder against Bulldog Knox or his society sweetheart, Donna Madring.

The hue and cry raised was solely against the mysterious Whisperer, which resulted in several hot sessions between Commissioner Gordon and Mayor Van Royston. The mayor's friend, Stan Fortune, was intensely active.

Wildcat had received a letter from the reform party committee which intimated even his high record in several past cases could not justify the continued failure to apprehend that arch-crook, The Whisperer. Wildcat had this letter in his pocket the afternoon of the Trador-Pullen game.

This game took place a week after the unsolved murder of Hopper Simes. The Trador eleven, since the death of Jack McGregor, had replaced Harton as the championship contender. Today's game with Pullen was one of the crucial contests. For Pullen had a halfback, named Colson, who was always a threat.

Wildcat Gordon and Quick Trigger occupied a sideline box. The commissioner's mind was wrestling with a problem. So far as he had been able to discover, the wise money was heavy on Trador to beat Pullen.

That meant the Dirk Thorton crowd was backing Trador to win. It was difficult to determine where the Hopper Simes murder might enter into this contest.

Bulldog Knox was in the lineup. In what respect was the knowledge of the murder, of the fistic battle that had ended in death, being used?

Wildcat kept his keen eyes on the stands. Just as the game opened, his elbow punched Quick Trigger's ribs. Wildcat straightened in his seat.

"Hellamighty! Look at that girl with Dirk Thorton!"

Wildcat Gordon was not the only person among the thousands who gasped and commented at the presence of the girl with the city's most notorious gambler. That blue-black bob, the pretty oval face, had been too often in the society columns to be missed.

Donna Madring, her cheeks flushed with too much rouge, and her lips far too red, was being seated beside the beady-eyed Dirk Thorton. She

was wearing a corsage of rare blossoms that could have come from nowhere but Thorton's own strange collection.

Before the astounded comment could roll through the stands, the game was on. Wildcat Gordon saw Bulldog Knox crash through the Pullen defense on the first play. That was the beginning of some of the maddest and roughest football the big stadium had ever witnessed.

THE madness and the rough tactics revolved around the plunging, tearing figure of Bulldog Knox. If the Trador quarterback had seen his sweetheart in the box with Dirk Thorton, he did not indicate it by a glance in that direction.

"Great guns!" exclaimed Wildcat. "That boy's gone crazy!"

Quick Trigger's eyes peered from under his bushy brows toward the Dirk Thorton box.

"I reckon maybe any young fellow would go crazy over a girl like that, Wildcat. But I'm thinking there's something a lot deeper behind all of this. Perhaps this is all being cooked up to have the game thrown in the last half."

Apparently Quick Trigger was wrong. Bulldog Knox was playing crazy football. He had the stands yelling, the crowd on its feet half of the time. Two Pullen players were removed from the game in the first quarter.

As a result, Bulldog Knox was called aside and warned. For the Pullen men went out on stretchers after having been hit by the mighty shoulders of Bulldog Knox. These collisions being in tight scrimmage, there was no evidence they were other than accidental.

Not so was the later removal of Halfback Colson, Pullen's chief threat against Trador. It was then in the beginning of the third quarter. Neither team had crossed the goal line.

Bulldog Knox's insane playing did not seem to add to his accuracy in receiving passes. The Pullen players were fast. Several times, Halfback Colson had been cut down close to the Trador goal.

In the beginning of the third quarter, Pullen started a march down the field. The scrimmage was rough in the first two downs. On the third down, Bulldog Knox was seen to plunge directly into the mass attack with the drive of a locomotive.

Two players rolled from the tangle. One got to his feet. The other lay motionless. Because of the close scrimmage, the officials must have missed what had happened. Only the seemingly nearsighted eyes of old Quick Trigger caught the detailed action.

"Bulldog Knox got him with his knee in the stomach after they were in the clear," said Quick Trigger. "I'd make a bet Colson is out of the game for the rest of the season."

Quick Trigger was correct. The star of the Pullen eleven was carried unconscious from the field. Even before play again got underway the megaphone reported that Colson had suffered four fractured ribs.

Wildcat Gordon saw the Trador coach and officials talking with Bulldog Knox. The mad quarterback was close enough for Wildcat to observe that the lad's face was haggard, that his eyes were bloodshot.

But the officials had not seen what Quick Trigger had reported, and the Trador coach argued to keep Bulldog Knox in the game.

From that moment, the Pullen eleven was a crushed and beaten outfit. Whenever Bulldog Knox started through, somehow there was gap opened up. Very apparently the mad, murderous quarterback had put fear into his opponents. And Bulldog Knox carried both touchdowns that resulted in a final score in favor of Trador of 13-0.

Usually the thousands in the stands would have been wild with enthusiasm. It would have been customary for the Trador supporters to have carried Bulldog Knox from the field on their shoulders.

But there was a strange hush at the close of the game. Even Bulldog Knox's teammates walked apart from him. The mad quarterback, who should have been the hero of those final furious smashes, suddenly was shunned by the boys of his own college.

Wildcat watched Bulldog Knox walk straight across the field toward the box occupied by Dirk Thorton and Donna Madring. The ugly Wart Dorgan and three others of Thorton's guards had been seated in the box.

WILDCAT moved fast. He was out on the field, getting across to the vicinity of the Dirk Thorton box. Though the crowd had started to move from the stands, feet ceased to thud. Eyes were turned upon the white-faced Bulldog Knox.

Then from the crowd went up a universal breath of disappointment. Bulldog Knox stood there with his helmet in his hand, making no movement as Donna Madring slipped one white hand under Dirk Thorton's arm and they started away.

The Trador coach was beside the mad quarterback. Bulldog Knox had not spoken a single word. Wildcat got close enough to see the player's red-rimmed eyes. There was a look on Bulldog Knox's face like that to be expected on the face of a man condemned to die.

He did not appear to hear the sharp words of the Trador coach.

"I'm afraid, Bulldog, there'll be an investigation! Sure, you won the game, but this is one game I'd rather have lost! Unless you have a lot of luck,

there'll be a demand to put you on the bench, and that will be just dandy!"

Wildcat Gordon halted, watching and listening. The words muttered by Bulldog Knox did not come to him. The mad quarterback dropped his helmet, ground it under one spiked foot and walked away toward the showers.

Quick Trigger was at Wildcat's elbow. His slow, almost apologetic voice, spoke in Wildcat's ear.

"I reckon this Donna Madring is too nice a little girl for anything like that to happen to her, Wildcat. I wouldn't know what you might be thinking of this setup, but if it happened to be our Tiny going out of here with Dirk Thorton I'd—-"

Old Quick Trigger ceased talking. His eyes smiled under their bushy brows. A sharp oath from Wildcat had been his only reply. Then Wildcat was gone, pushing through the crowd toward the outside parking space.

Though he could and did assume two identities, Wildcat Gordon now was swearing because he was not two persons. This was because he greatly desired to be in two places at the same time.

Knowing what he did of Bulldog Knox's final battle with the murdered Hopper Simes and the lack of any report to the police by persons who must have known of this, coupled with Bulldog's madness in today's game, Wildcat would have liked very much to have kept the football star under his eye.

He did not feel he could assign this job to any man in his department, and he would not expose old Quick Trigger to the danger which might be involved.

But at this moment the girl, Donna Madring, was more important. Wildcat had made a thorough checkup on the beautiful society girl. He had discovered that Bulldog Knox apparently was the only man in her life, and their engagement had been announced.

At this time, Wildcat had learned that all of the nearest members of Donna Madring's family were touring in Europe. And the next editions of the sensational newspapers would be filled with the public appearance of the lovely society girl with the notorious Dirk Thorton. The reporters would be quick to connect this with the murderous, savage playing of Bulldog Knox.

Wildcat realized he had but one course to pursue. He had little difficulty following the Dirk Thorton limousine from the stadium field. His frequent changes from one type of small roadster to another made his trailing inconspicuous.

Wildcat achieved the remarkable result of changing his appearance as he drove. Through the rear window of the big limousine leaving the grounds and driving into the city, Wildcat could see the rounded head of Donna Madring close to the profile of Dirk Thorton.

WILDCAT'S roadster was less than a block away when Dirk Thorton's big car rolled into the garage of an exclusive uptown apartment.

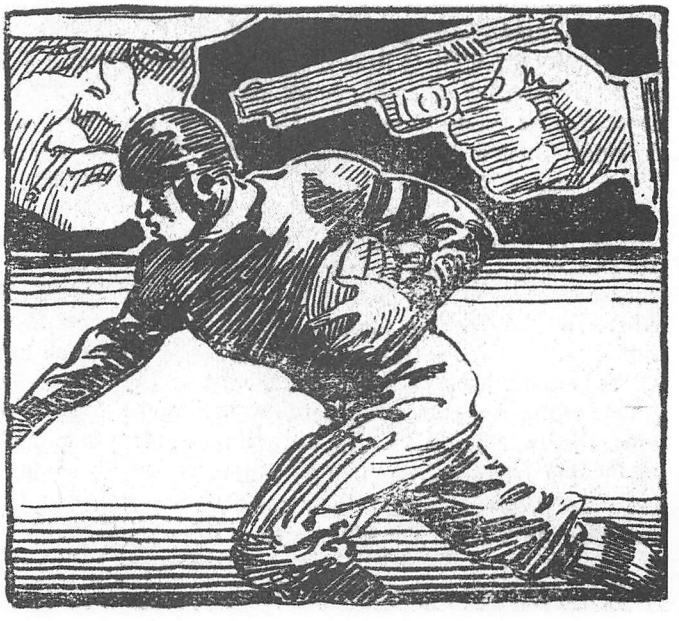
But when Dirk Thorton, with the slender Donna Madring clinging to his arm, entered an elevator in the big apartment building, Wildcat was only a negligible little man dressed in gray, who apparently was peering nearsightedly at names listed on the board in the apartment house lobby.

None who observed this man in gray would have suspected he was the notorious Whisperer. His face and figure were not such as to distinguish him from any other of several thousand average men of mild, unassuming appearance.

The Whisperer noted that only two of Dirk Thorton's guards accompanied him into the elevator. He was close enough to catch the beady glitter in Dirk Thorton's eyes, the set look upon the pretty face of Donna Madring.

The Whisperer moved from the apartment building on gliding soles. He went back to the roadster, which he had parked in a dark side street. His quick hands opened the rumble seat of the little car.

Two closely set black eyes glowed from the opened space. A dog's voice whimpered. A red tongue licked at The Whisperer's hand. The dog was a scottish terrier, with deadly fangs. He often rode in the rumble seats of The Whisperer's cars.



At times, he could become as much of a menace to crooks as The Whisperer himself.

"We're going places, Brian Boru," whispered his master. "You'll be quiet, old fellow."

Perhaps Brian Boru did not understand all of the words, but his uncanny instinct led him to get all of the meaning from his master's tone. His whimper was delighted, and his red tongue licked at his sharp, white fangs.

Very apparently, Boru the Scottish terrier was ready for action, whatever form it might take.

IN the meantime, the two guards accompanying Dirk Thorton and Donna Madring to his fourteenth-floor apartment were sent to rooms adjoining the main room without hearing any conversation between the beady-eyed gambling chief and the beautiful girl. Only the hard eyes of the guards exchanged meaning glances as they departed.

Donna Madring sank at once into a deep chair, her eyes closing as if overcome by weariness. Dirk Thorton moved about with his usual nervous quickness. Scores of vases of rare flowers filled the room with heavy, clinging perfume.

Dirk Thorton plucked one of the rarest flowers. He walked over to the girl, his nervous fingers strewing petals along the floor. He spoke in a soothing, low tone.

"It would be best if you accept the facts as they are, my dear," he said. "I like all of my special friends to be agreeable."

The usually vivid Donna Madring spoke lifelessly.

"I have accepted the facts, or I would not be here."

"You're a nice, little girl," murmured the gambler, his fingers caressing, then tearing another fragrant blossom to bits. "I seldom have nice, little girls as special friends."

"Oh, please!" cried Donna Madring. "You have me here! Let's not pretend anything! It's—it's just that I'm here! Isn't that enough?"

"Perhaps, perhaps," soothed Dirk Thorton. "You would like some good wine, a rare, very rare wine, like my flowers?"

Donna Madring's slender body shivered. She dabbed at her red lips with a lacy handkerchief. It had the same scent as the dainty handkerchief The Whisperer had found beside the body of Hopper Simes.

"Yes—some wine," the girl said, faintly.

One of the hard-eyed bodyguards brought in the wine. Donna Madring drank quickly, almost gulping the intoxicant. It was as if the pretty society girl had made up her mind to certain things, and she was gathering her courage.

The bodyguard moved out on slinking feet. The flush on the girl's cheeks became more pronounced under the rouge. Dirk Thorton took his own handkerchief and suddenly wiped it across Donna Madring's lips.

"I don't like my girlfriends using too much lipstick," he said, softly.

The slender girl suddenly sobbed. She could not repress a shudder as the gambler's nervous fingers suddenly caressed her smooth throat. His hands were strong with the odor of some tropical flower.

"Oh, is there no other way—no other way?" the girl cried out.

"You said you had accepted the facts," came Dirk Thorton's voice in a cold tone. "Perhaps after the big game, then maybe—"

He abruptly swept the girl into his arms.

CHAPTER XI
WHEN LIGHTS GO OUT

DONNA MADRING cried out and clawed suddenly at Dirk Thorton's face. His gleaming, beady eyes were close. His embracing arms partly released her, and he swore.

Perhaps Donna Madring imagined for the moment that it had been planned for the lights to go out at this time. She tore herself free from Dirk Thorton's grasping hands and sprang to one side.

"Bull! Roney!" shouted the gambler. "What the hell?"

It became instantly apparent that Dirk Thornton had not planned for the sudden darkness. He had reached for the girl, stumbled and fallen across her chair.

The gambler's shout of alarm brought his two guards jamming each other in the gloom from another room. Both were swearing. Then one let out a louder and more agonized oath.

Throughout the big, flower-filled apartment room an eerie, hissing whisper uttered a command.

"Take him, Brian Boru!"

From the repeated, profane yells of pain, the tearing of cloth and the vicious snarling close to the floor near a doorway, the scottish terrier had obeyed his master's command. Boru had his own effective method of attack in the darkness.

His sharp fangs slashed into the muscles of one of the guard's legs. That had caused the yelling man to twist around, bending to free the gripping teeth. This was the mistake the smart Boru awaited.

The guard's movement brought his face closer to the dog. The black, furry body could not be seen moving in the darkness. But Boru had let go of the guard's leg, sprang and fastened himself securely on the man's nose.

Boru weighed perhaps less than thirty pounds. But that much weight, attached to teeth fastened in

a man's nose, can be most unpleasant. The guard gurgled oaths, flailing around on the floor.

During this, the penetrating voice of The Whisperer again filled the room.

It commanded, "If you move, Thorton, I shall kill!"

DIRK THORTON had been through one visit from The Whisperer. He possibly did not move. But draperies over one of the windows swayed and could be marked against the light from outside the room. At the same instant a heavy vase of flowers in that window alcove came crashing over.

"I've got 'im, Dirk!" yelled the second guard.

His gun racketed with his yell. He was pouring lead into the window alcove. Concealed at one side, The Whisperer made an accurate estimate of the position of the gunman's body and head.

A hissing, as of air being released from a cylinder, filled the room. *"A-ar-argh!"*

It was a gurgled cry, as if the shooting guard's throat had been slit. Bullets from The Whisperer's silenced automatic had sliced through the great vein of his neck. Strangely, the death wound was almost identical with that which had killed Detective Tim O'Rourke.

Dirk Thorton was moving toward the outer door in the darkness. His feet scuffled along the rug of the living room. One viselike hand of The Whisperer fastened on the side of his neck.

"I'm saving you, Thorton!" came that sinister hissing in the gambler's ear. "Saving you, understand, for the pay-off!"

The Whisperer's iron knuckles then smashed upon the round spot behind one of Dirk Thorton's ears. The gambler went out as quickly as his own lights.

When The Whisperer's hands sought Donna Madring's shrinking form in the darkness, the girl resisted and attempted to scream.

No doubt that whispering voice sounded like a hideous threat to the society girl. On the floor, the scottish terrier had effectively silenced the other Dirk Thorton guard.

The manner of that silencing was soon to add new terror of The Whisperer. For the vicious Boru had again shifted his fangs, from the man's nose to his throat.

"You're The Whisperer, the terrible killer!" moaned Donna Madring. "You don't know what you've done! Let me go! Let me go!"

The voice hissed, "I'm your friend, as you'll find out! But you're coming with me! Boru, drop him!"

Donna Madring's next attempt to scream was prevented by a hard hand clamping over her mouth. She was handled as if she had been a small child. A heavy drapery, pulled from a window, swathed her slim body and rendered her helpless.

Had the dumbwaiter shaft in the exclusive apartment been a few inches smaller, or had The Whisperer been a man of greater bulk, he could never have accomplished the feat that followed.

For he was leaving the apartment of Dirk Thorton, with its two dead men and the unconscious gambler, by the same route he had entered.

In making the descent, The Whisperer kept the limp figure of Donna Madring on top of the small sliding elevator in the shaft. And riding in the box itself was the furry, black Brian Boru.

There was a tinge of red blood across Boru's black whiskers.

At the foot of the shaft, The Whisperer removed the girl's light body and, followed by Boru, went out into an alley through the window he had used in entering. Less than half an hour later, The Whisperer's roadster was halted in a street of narrow tenements.

While this cluttered street was filled with a moving evening crowd, none gave more than a passing glance to the gray-clad man carrying the draperied bundle. It was not considered either polite or healthy to ask too many questions in this unsavory downtown street.

Also, there were those who had seen this same gray man before. Now he was followed by the black Brian Boru. It was reported that this pair merited the silence that afforded protection to many of the dubious denizens of this neighborhood.

THE WHISPERER now quickly ascended narrow stairs to a fourth-floor room. This was a barren, ill-furnished place, with a small alcove for a kitchen. When Boru had followed him in, The Whisperer placed Donna Madring on a hard chair, went to the door and called, "Mrs. Cooney, will you come up in five minutes?"

His call was like a hissing whisper in a great cavern.

Then he freed the drapery from around Donna Madring's tumbled hair and her flushed, scared face.

His whispering voice became more pleasant.

"You heard me call Mrs. Cooney," he said. "She is a big woman, rather inclined to be rough. You are to stay here with her, and the length of time depends on how much you want to tell. Now how about it, Miss Madring? I'm your friend. What's all this, you being with Dirk Thorton?"

There was no doubt but the pretty society girl was in sheer terror. The pupils of her big eyes widened as she looked into the peculiar face of The Whisperer.

"I'll never tell anything!" she murmured. "Not if you kill me. That's final, and I'll not talk anymore!"

The Whisperer's smile made him look ghastly.

The Whisperer's iron knuckles then smashed upon the round spot behind one of Dirk Thorton's ears.

Until Mrs. Cooney, a heavy-featured, greasy-looking woman arrived, he did all the talking. Donna Madring had nerve, too much. She greeted all questions with stony silence.

"Mrs. Cooney, you will see that this girl does not leave this place," ordered The Whisperer. Then he added: "Brian Boru, she is not to get away. Understand?"

Donna Madring shivered as the black dog with his beady eyes crouched close to her feet. Dried blood still remained on the terrier's stiff whiskers. The girl could not have missed the gurgling cries of the guard the dog had killed.

Mrs. Cooney said, "I'll see that she stays," and planted her two hundred pounds of bulk in a chair by the door. Then she added, "The same arrangement, ten a day?"

"The same arrangement," said The Whisperer, handing Mrs. Cooney two ten-dollar bills. "It may be a couple of days. You will see that she has good food."

The Whisperer had made a keen analysis of Donna Madring. He was well aware the girl was in fear of him. But behind that he could detect a deeper

terror, some horror, no less, that had driven her almost into the arms of the unscrupulous Dirk Thorton.

"I HAVE Donna Madring, and she is safe enough," announced Wildcat Gordon an hour later to old Quick Trigger. "But there is more to be done tonight. In the morning, there will be all hell to pay."

"Another killing or two reported for The Whisperer," sighed Quick Trigger. "Wildcat, I'm sorry I ever made those crazy dental plates. You're giving me gray hairs."

What hairs did fringe Quick Trigger's bald spot were all gray. They had been for a long time.

"This time there will be no report to the police of The Whisperer," announced Wildcat. "I expect a couple of Dirk Thorton's boys might be found in the ditch, or perhaps they won't. Quick Trigger, I know a place where bodies disappear forever."

Wildcat did not then explain where bodies were made to disappear. He added: "We've got to move fast, Quick Trigger. You're sure the woman, out there the night Hopper Simes was killed, is this Platinum Nell?"

Because of his keen memory and his years of service in the police department, Quick Trigger was perhaps the best-informed man in the city on men and women with records. His remarkable knowledge had become invaluable to Wildcat Gordon as police commissioner.

"Platinum Nell has seen her best days," stated Quick Trigger. "But once she rated high with some of the first-class boys. I think this Wart Dorgan fell for her in a big way a few years ago. I'd say, if I were wanting Platinum Nell, she might be right close to Wart Dorgan now."

WART DORGAN, with his ugly face, was not difficult to trace. Especially as it seemed the two men who were seeking him might have a little job of murder on hand. Neither Wildcat Gordon nor old Quick Trigger now had any appearance of having ever had other than the worst of contacts with the police.

Quick Trigger had for years made a hobby of disguises, though he had never employed them while connected with the regular department. But tonight he might have passed for a deep-sea sailor fresh from the ocean.

His companion was the inconspicuous Whisperer.

Quick Trigger knew all of the right places to go and the proper persons to ask questions. But when he had got the information he was after, he said to The Whisperer, "It's a tough spot, Wildcat. It seems Wart Dorgan has an off night; he and some of the Dirk Thorton boys are putting on a party of their own in that joint they call The Boiled Owl. There'll probably be half a hundred gunmen and their molls hanging around."

The Whisperer smiled slightly.

"And we want this Platinum Nell without too much fuss being raised, Quick Trigger. Well, we'll try a little game. Even my good friend has to take orders. Wait here."

The Whisperer passed, unnoticed, through the motley crowd in a corner barroom. He paused to toss off a small glass of brandy. Then he moved into the one small telephone booth, in the rear of the place.

Those who saw the little, gray man talking into the telephone would have been amazed if they had heard that conversation.

For The Whisperer had removed his queer dental plates. He was speaking in the cold, clipped tone of Wildcat Gordon, commissioner of police. He had Deputy Henry Bolton on the other end of the wire; he was handing him an order that admitted of no argument.

"You will personally head one squad and see that two other squads are on hand at The Boiled Owl in Argus Street in exactly thirty-five minutes from now! I want the place raided and every man there taken to the Forty-eighth Street precinct and held until the lineup tomorrow!"

"But what—"

Deputy Bolton got out only those two words.

"I'm giving the order, you're taking it!" snapped Wildcat. "Any time you don't feel that way, you can hand in your commission! Especially, I want Wart Dorgan taken and locked up until morning! And get this! There are a number of molls in that dump! They are to be rolled into two wagons, taken up Argus Street to Fifty-eighth, and then turned loose!"

Wildcat Gordon grinned. Deputy Bolton did not know his muttered oaths were coming over the wire.

"I especially want a woman with platinum fillings in her teeth to ride with that mob of molls! If she isn't taken from The Boiled Owl, and there is any tip-off or slip-up on any of this, you can take up the matter of your resignation with your friend, Mayor Van Royston!"

The Whisperer clicked the dental plates back into his jaws. He eased from the barroom and rejoined Quick Trigger in the street.

"We'll be having us a cup of java," said Wildcat. "In about forty minutes from now, you and I are due to pick Platinum Nell out of a bunch of nice girls who will be trying to tear the hair out of a few of my coppers."

"Wildcat," said Quick Trigger, "sometimes I think you are crazy. I'll bet you've ordered The

Boiled Owl raided, and I'll bet further you wished that sweet job off onto Henry Bolton."

WILDCAT only grinned. A few minutes later their roadster was parked in the vicinity of Argus and Fifty-eighth Street. At about the same time, three squad cars and four patrol wagons were quietly converging upon the hot spot known as The Boiled Owl.

In this brothel of the underworld, Wart Dorgan rated. Rated as the strong-arm lieutenant of the classy Dirk Thorton should rate. Wart Dorgan had renewed an old friendship, or apparently so.

For a hard-faced woman with brilliant eyes and gleaming platinum-filled teeth sat at his table. She was drunk, and she laughed too loudly. She seemed to have adopted a possessive attitude toward the tough killer, Wart Dorgan.

There were other molls, more than a dozen women, in the place. The comeback of "Platinum" Nell to favor with Wart Dorgan was starting some gossip. But the others were smart enough to have an idea what it was all about.

Wart Dorgan had needed to use Platinum Nell for some ulterior purpose. They shook their heads and smiled, these hard women. Platinum Nell would last only until Wart Dorgan finished this job, whatever it was.

Most of these hard women were too wise to have taken that chance. When Wart Dorgan was finished this time with Platinum Nell—well, cast-off molls sometimes talked, if they lived. In the argot of the underworld, Platinum Nell was a prize chump, as good as dead.

CHAPTER XII
DEPUTY BOLTON'S DILEMMA

FOR the type of nice boys they were, the celebrators in The Boiled Owl were unusually law-abiding. No violence had marked the evening. It was one of those occasional underworld affairs where the finger was upon no one; all were friends.

To be sure, there was the little matter of weapons concealed contrary to the statutes, but who in all of that motley assembly would expect Wildcat Gordon's coppers to be bothering about such a trivial matter?

The sudden appearance of armed policemen at the four doors giving entrance to The Boiled Owl created sudden, silent consternation.

The narrowed eyes of the ugly-nosed Wart Dorgan went cold and concentrated upon the hard face of his temporarily restored moll, Platinum Nell.

Wart Dorgan's eyes shot a question, with a promise of murder in their pupils if he failed to get the right answer. Others in the unexpected police raid were watching Wart Dorgan and Platinum Nell.

"I knew it," whispered another moll. "There's something dopey about this new hookup between Wart and Platinum Nell!"

Wart Dorgan must have been satisfied that Platinum Nell was in the clear as to the cause of this police raid. He had whipped to his feet, confronting the commanding officer of the raiders.

This was the hawk-nosed Henry Bolton, with his small, round mouth. Undoubtedly Wart Dorgan had enough on his conscience to imagine any one of several items being responsible for this cold pickup.

Henry Bolton's half-apologetic explanation did not ease Wart Dorgan's mind.

"It's a little ride down to headquarters for everybody in the place," said Henry Bolton. "I don't know what it's all about. Commissioner Gordon will explain all of that in the morning."

"So Commissioner Gordon will explain it, huh?" yelled Wart Dorgan. "And we cool off overnight, yeah? Not me, I don't!"

Smash went one of Wart Dorgan's fists, so unexpectedly that Deputy Bolton caught the bunched knuckles on the end of his hooked nose. Immediately the place became a bedlam. Several mobsters went for their rods, though the smarter ones laid off of that.

With blood flowing from his twisted nose, Deputy Bolton went to the floor, attempting to get his revolver into his hand. Someone thoughtfully switched off the lights. There was no shooting.

Police sticks rapped here and there, and those in the place who made a break for the doors were promptly cornered. The fight was short and sharp, but due to the number of coppers, it was all over in a few minutes.

Cursing habitues of The Boiled Owl were pushed into patrol wagons. Two of these wagons took care of the women who had been in the place.

Wildcat Gordon's pleasant prediction was fulfilled. The carmine fingernails of The Boiled Owl ladies scratched the faces of his coppers.

THE raging Deputy Bolton, furious in the beginning over Wildcat's unexplained order, accompanied the two patrol wagons driven to Argus and Fifty-eighth Street. With Deputy Bolton was the wooden-faced Sergeant Thorsen, the right-hand man of Wildcat Gordon.

"All this is getting me into one hell of a mess!" complained Deputy Bolton. "I'm finding Commissioner Gordon and he's going to explain to me what this is all about!"

Sergeant Thorsen's best laugh was much like the rubbing together of two pieces of sandpaper.

"When Wildcat Gordon explains to you, I'll be out looking for two blue moons," he said.

The patrol wagons filled with screeching women reached the intersection of Argus and Fifty-eighth Street. Henry Bolton was swearing steadily to himself as he gave the order to open the doors and set the molls free.

Half a dozen squad men with the patrol wagons had nearly as much trouble getting the screaming, fighting women out of the wagons as they had had getting them in. Windows popped open in the neighborhood.

It was some little time before the molls understood they were being turned loose. Then they fled, singly and in pairs.

As the patrol wagons moved away, Deputy Bolton was disappointed. He had expected to see Commissioner Wildcat Gordon. Wildcat had not appeared.

Now Deputy Bolton was unaware that in the roundup of the men in The Boiled Owl, one had had slipped out of the police trap. This was none other than Wart Dorgan. He had taken advantage of the confusion and the snapping out of the lights after he had hit Deputy Bolton.

When the wagons discharged the screeching women, Wart Dorgan was gliding along in the shadows of that same block. The aide to Dirk Thorton was considerably puzzled. Perhaps he was convinced all of the raid was connected with Platinum Nell.

Wart Dorgan swore with amazement when he saw all of the women from The Boiled Owl. One man had slipped out onto the street. He desired to stay clear of the police, but he ran forward, keeping close to the buildings.

One woman started running. She seemed more anxious than the others to get away from the vicinity of the coppers and the brawl created by the other molls. Wart Dorgan saw the woman was Platinum Nell.

The man sprang forward, yelling, "Wait, Nell, wait! This whole thing's a frame!"

If Platinum Nell heard, it only added speed to her flight. A crowd was assembled around the other women she had left behind. Platinum Nell passed between two buildings and over into a quieter street. The slower Wart Dorgan was in the same passageway when he heard Platinum Nell let out a shrill scream. Wart Dorgan ran, pulling out one of his rods. He reached the quiet street.

To his ears came no further alarm in the voice of Platinum Nell. But there was a sudden, penetrating whisper echoing through the shadows.

"Choke her off!" said that whisper. "Get her into the car! Here comes a squad car!"

Wart Dorgan had a vague view of two figures on the opposite side of the street. He saw that one of these was holding Platinum Nell, thrusting her into the seat of a roadster. The other figure was so indistinct in that light, no feature could be picked out.

But Wart Dorgan did not need to be informed he was looking at The Whisperer. His automatic whipped up. But when his finger was cocked, he only swore and withheld his fire.

A police squad car rolled into the block. The roadster was already starting away. The two cars passed, and the roadster shot around the next corner. The cursing Wart Dorgan was temporarily balked. He could neither shoot nor pursue the roadster.

But he got one slight break. As the small car carrying Platinum Nell passed under a street lamp, Wart Dorgan's quick eyes caught the license number. Three minutes later, he was in a taxicab, moving in the direction he believed the roadster had taken.

IF The Whisperer and Quick Trigger had known of the nearness of Wart Dorgan when they had seized Platinum Nell, the roadster probably would have taken a more devious route to The Whisperer's destination.

Platinum Nell had let out one scream as she had been seized. There had been no added alarm, for the simple reason that a ruthless fist had socked her rounded chin.

The Whisperer had neither time nor the desire to pull that punch. An effective anaesthetic was indicated if Platinum Nell was to be taken quietly.

"I feel kind of funny about this, Wildcat," said Quick Trigger, as The Whisperer shot the small car into the narrow tenement street where his hideout was located. "I reckon there'll be blue Hades popping around headquarters when Henry Bolton jugs that mob and isn't able to explain to Mayor Van Royston what it's all about."

"Too bad," said The Whisperer. "But I'll probably be there in the morning to do the explaining. In the meantime, we'll see what's on Platinum Nell's mind when she comes out of it."

The Whisperer was mistaken on one point. He was not to be at headquarters in the morning when the storm broke over the raid on The Boiled Owl.

In fact, about that time several persons, including Mayor Van Royston, the influential Stan Fortune, and members of the reform party police committee, were to be raging over the absence of Commissioner Wildcat Gordon.

Unaware that disaster was not far away, The Whisperer and Quick Trigger got Platinum Nell into the barren fourth-floor room presided over by the capable, rough Mrs. Cooney.

Mrs. Cooney grinned and said, "Another one,

huh? That'll be an extra ten, if I'm supposed to look out for her. And I think this other little girl is a nice, little thing."

The Whisperer shot a quick glance at the hard-boiled Mrs. Cooney. If Donna Madring had gotten under the tough skin of this backstreet landlady, there was no doubt but that she was a nice, little girl. And The Whisperer himself had had no doubt on that score from the beginning.

COLD water and a dash of brandy snapped Platinum Nell back to the conscious world. Brought her back with screaming words that caused The Whisperer to abruptly pinch her jaws. He was looking at the wide-eyed, terror-filled Donna Madring.

"No more of that kind of talk," he gritted, "or I'll hit you twice as hard as I did before! When you open your mouth again, start telling all about what you were doing out in the rain the night Hopper Simes was murdered!"

Donna Madring gave a sudden little scream of fear. She stopped her own red mouth with the back of a white hand, clenching her teeth until the blood welled from the skin.

"Wouldn't you like to know?" blazed Platinum Nell. "You ain't runnin' nothin' over on me, see! But you're the guy that was there; you know all about who killed Hopper Simes!"

The furry, black Scottish terrier was lying in the middle of the room. His eyes glowed like coals of fire at Platinum Nell.

The Whisperer gave Nell an inscrutable, ghastly smile.

"You'll talk your head off in about two minutes," he promised, quietly. "If you don't—"

Old Quick Trigger had moved over beside a window; he looked down into the narrow street. He was still in the disguise of a sailor. He thumbed The Whisperer's ribs.

"Our car's been spotted," he warned in a low tone. "We ought've parked it farther away. There are two men watching it, and two others are prowling the block on both sides of the street."

The Whisperer instantly confirmed Quick Trigger's warning.

The roadster in which they had brought Platinum Nell to the hideout was parked at the end of the block. It became apparent that the men who had found it had not arrived in time to discover where Platinum Nell had been taken.

"I saw Wart Dorgan, so Henry Bolton didn't get him," said Quick Trigger. "That means we'll have the whole Dirk Thorton crowd searching every dump in the block. We've got to do something quick."

"We'll go out the back way, get to the car and throw them off," said The Whisperer. "If we're cornered here, it would be a complete rub-out."

The Whisperer turned to Donna Madring.

"Keep quiet and everything will be all right," he promised. "Mrs. Cooney, you look after her. If Platinum Nell starts anything, put her out."

Brian Boru's stumpy, black tail thumped the bare floor.

"Watch them, Boru!" commanded The Whisperer.

Platinum Nell started to let out a scream. The terrier sprang toward her, snarling deep in his throat. Platinum Nell closed her mouth.

A minute later, The Whisperer and Quick Trigger had reached the dark alley behind the old tenement building. They had come down the back-stairs and over a low wall.

"I reckon it's going to be a hot spot, Wildcat," said old Quick Trigger. "You figure on trying to grab the roadster and make a getaway?"

Quick Trigger had produced a Police Positive from his own clothes.

"None of that," said The Whisperer. "Two of us can't make it. You get out of the alley and keep going. I'm pretty sure none of that crowd has ever seen me. I'll get the car away."

CHAPTER XIII
THE WHISPERER TRAPPED

OLD Quick Trigger was protesting The Whisperer's plan. The apparently mild ex-deputy of police was itching for action. He started to put away his revolver reluctantly as they were about to emerge from the narrow alley into a side street.

The parked roadster was around the corner from this spot.

"You go that way, and I'll walk around the other street," instructed The Whisperer. "I'll be in the roadster before they suspect who I am. I'll—"

"You get up your hands, both of you, or you'll be sliced off in the middle!" snarled a hard voice. "So you thought you'd pull another one! Well, the game's up!"

The Whisperer dived from his toes. The owner of the voice had a rod in each hand. One blazed past The Whisperer's face. Old Quick Trigger let out a cry of pain. There was the thudding of a blow; The Whisperer saw another man had struck Quick Trigger over the head with the butt of a gun.

The Whisperer saw this, even while his head was ramming into the stomach of the man who was doing the shooting. This man gave a deep grunt and went on his back. The Whisperer's slashing right fist flattened his nose.

Old Quick Trigger was on his hands and knees. Blood flowed from a cut behind one ear. He slid onto his face.

Though The Whisperer had put one man out, he was looking up at three others as he attempted to

roll free and get one of his silenced automatics into action. Deadly rods were centered upon him. He sat up and slowly lifted his hands.

"We can't get nothin' out of 'em here!" barked a voice, and The Whisperer recognized the hard tone of Wart Dorgan himself.

It felt then as if a torpedo had exploded in The Whisperer's head. Wart Dorgan had acted with his words. A slashing blow laid The Whisperer limply on the sidewalk.

"Get out of this!" rapped Wart Dorgan. "Now we know The Whisperer's got both Platinum Nell and that Madring dame, but we can't bring the cops down on us combing through all these damned joints in the block! We'll get 'em where they'll talk, and I want some more orders from the boss!"

Two minutes later two closed cars and The Whisperer's own roadster rolled away from the tenement district. The Dirk Thorton crowd apparently understood the logic of Wart Dorgan's argument.

It would be much easier to make The Whisperer and his companion spill what they knew than to arouse the several hundred persons quartered in that unsavory neighborhood searching for the missing girls.

NEITHER The Whisperer nor Quick Trigger had any knowledge of the ride on which they were taken. The cars, directed by Wart Dorgan, rolled from the city limits and into the hills.

They proceeded into one of the most exclusive sections of the suburban area. All around were the estates of millionaires. On some of the larger private estates were ponds with duck blinds. The cars were halted not far from one of these ponds. Still The Whisperer was troubled only by the fantastic dreams of an aching brain trying to fight its way back to consciousness.

The Whisperer's first understanding moment came with the bite of liquor being poured down his throat. He felt as if he must have died and been buried. For he was lying on an oozy, cold rock, and the dimly lighted room was like a vault carved from stone under a hill.

The Whisperer could feel that his wrists and ankles were bound to this oozy rock. He heard a groan and, twisting his head, he saw the gleaming bald head of old Quick Trigger nearby. Quick Trigger was similarly fastened to the stone.

There were many men in the vault-like room. The Whisperer was trying to recall something. Yes, that was it. Though it had been dark, he had once before passed through this room. For there was the same graveyard odor, an acrid smell which irritated his nostrils.

First of all, The Whisperer made sure his double identity had not been discovered. His dental plates were still in place. He never carried anything on his clothes that would have identified him as the police commissioner.

The ugly face of Wart Dorgan came into the dim light. A hard hand slapped across The Whisperer's face. The blow brought an involuntary grunt.

"So you've come out of the ether?" rapped Wart Dorgan. "Then you might as well begin talking now! It'll save both of us a lot of trouble! Where did you put Platinum Nell and that Madring dame?"

The only reply Wart Dorgan got was a ghostly chuckle.

"So you're going to be smart?" he yelled. "Well, we'll see about that! You listen while we go to work on your friend!"

Whatever the torture applied, a cigarette lighter glowed.

Old Quick Trigger groaned, but he said, "Don't talk! Don't mind me! They can't do any more than bump me off!"

"So?" said Wart Dorgan, sarcastically. "Well, you'll notice your shoes have been taken off! That rock, to which you're pegged, slides slowly down the hill! Maybe an inch every five minutes! About one foot from your bare toes is a nice, little vat!"

"Sure!" interrupted the penetrating hiss of The Whisperer. "And that vat's full of quicklime! And that's where you filthy rats get rid of some of the bodies you don't want found! But you can boil me in oil, and I'll be damned if you get anything!"

WART DORGAN swore vilely. The Whisperer could feel the slow sliding of the flat rock on which they were bound. No doubt, this was going to be very unpleasant. First their bare feet would go into the searing quicklime.

It was a gruesome thought. When quicklime finished its work, bone and muscle disappeared. If the rock continued to slide, it could later be dragged out, and there would be no trace of either The Whisperer or Quick Trigger.

Or if it only slid part way, first their feet would be burned off. Their lower limbs would be slowly consumed. The Whisperer could feel the slow movement of the sliding rock. Sweat popped on his forehead.

"How about it?" snapped Wart Dorgan. "Where is Platinum Nell? What did you want with her? What have you done with that Madring dame?"

The Whisperer only hissed a sweet oath in his direction.

"O.K.," said Wart Dorgan. "It'll be maybe an hour before that rock gives your feet a hot bath! You can be thinking it over! But we haven't got all day, for it's now afternoon; and you're going to talk

before the big game starts, or you won't have any legs to walk away on!"

"Keep your mouth shut, Whisperer!" came the voice of Quick Trigger. "They're only bluffing!"

But The Whisperer did not believe Wart Dorgan was bluffing. There was too much at stake. The Whisperer had not known how many hours they had been unconscious. From what Wart Dorgan had said, it must now be afternoon. They must have been here for hours.

And The Whisperer had become informed of some of the betting on that final big game of the season. Trador was matched with the fast Eagles. Thousands of dollars already had changed hands.

And though Trador, with the mad Bulldog Knox, was favored in the betting for the championship, The Whisperer was aware that a vast fortune had been wagered the other way.

For some reason the wise ones, and that meant the Dirk Thorton crowd, were plunging to the limit on the Eagles to beat Trador.

Now it must be important to Dirk Thorton and others that Platinum Nell be discovered before she talked, either before or after the big game.

No doubt then, pretty Donna Madring would be silenced, or perhaps worse. And The Whisperer now was aware there was powerful pressure being brought to bear upon Bulldog Knox.

So powerful, that Bulldog Knox had become mad, insane. For he must do the bidding of the Dirk Thorton crowd or face an alternative worse than death.

The rock was sliding slowly toward the quicklime vat. The Whisperer, for once, judged he had waited too long to break what he knew. And if Wart Dorgan, which meant Dirk Thorton, became aware of all he had discovered, there would be no doubt about his own and Quick Trigger's death in the hideous quicklime vat.

For The Whisperer knew this was the same underground passage under the hill from which he had escaped the night he had raided Dirk Thorton's ticket-speculating enterprise.

Wart Dorgan was not satisfied to await slow results. His hard knuckles beat The Whisperer's face. A lighter flame caused old Quick Trigger to emit agonized groans. But neither talked.

"O.K., then, smart guy!" snapped Wart Dorgan. "It's the nice, slow, hot bath for your tootsies!"

The Whisperer then felt the first touch of the terrible, searing chemical.

It would not take much of an immersion in that quicklime to at least cripple Quick Trigger and himself for life. The Whisperer looked over at the gray face of Quick Trigger. The old man attempted to pass him back a smile, but it was ghastly.

THE WHISPERER drew his toes up against the cords holding his ankles, saving his skin as long as possible from the bite of the quicklime. He wondered if anything had happened in his hideout where the stout Mrs. Cooney had been left to guard Donna Madring and Platinum Nell.

It was apparent the Dirk Thorton crowd had not dared risk searching that notorious neighborhood for the girls. This would have brought on a mob clash. That would have meant the police. No, Dirk Thorton's "upper underworld" racket did not want any of this lower order of trouble.

The Whisperer tried to think of a way out. One of his heels seemed to be catching fire. Could he withstand the pain or, more important, could he let old Quick Trigger be tortured to his death?

There was no answer to that question. For even if he talked, told Wart Dorgan what he knew, that would only make their execution surer. If he talked, that sliding rock would undoubtedly go all the way, carrying their bodies into the quicklime bath.

Why hadn't he taken Sergeant Thorsen into his confidence? Now none but himself knew the secret of this underground tunnel leading from the crooked gambler's estate in the hills.

He could figure no way in which any other person might discover that secret in time to accomplish anything.

Again he wondered how long Mrs. Cooney and Brian Boru would keep Donna Madring and Platinum Nell trapped in his hideout.

Would the girls eventually fall into Dirk Thorton's hands?

CHAPTER XIV
BRIAN BORU'S BRAIN

PERHAPS two hours before the torture of The Whisperer and old Quick Trigger had begun, the black Scottish terrier, Brian Boru, was having a change of heart. Seldom did this vicious, intelligent dog show affection for any person but his master.

It was around noon. Mrs. Cooney, her heavy figure planted across the door, had been napping. The rough, big woman awoke suddenly to notice that the black dog had for the first time moved from his watchful position in front of the hard-faced Platinum Nell.

The moll with the shining teeth had seemingly been held in abject fear by the presence of the black dog. Well she might, for there was dried human blood on Boru's black whiskers. His fangs always were partly bared and ready for action.

Boru's eyes smoldered with hate as he watched this woman. He had seen the encounter between Platinum Nell and his master. That was enough for

Boru. Let her make a move and see what would happen.

Mrs. Cooney had not noticed Platinum Nell slip her hand several times to the bosom of her dress, then apparently change her mind and let the hand drop. The moll was in too great a terror of Brian Boru to act.

But now Mrs. Cooney awoke from a nap to see Brian Boru sliding across the barren room on his stomach. He was moving toward an iron cot on which Donna Madring had lain down. One of the pretty girl's hands trailed limply to the floor.

Mrs. Cooney was about to start up, to order the dog back. She knew his most vicious instincts. But suddenly she did not interfere. For Brian Boru had reached Donna Madring's trailing hand. His red tongue licked quickly out and touched the white skin of the society girl's hand.

Donna Madring smiled a little. Mrs. Cooney gasped with amazement. For the girl had placed her hand gently on Brian Boru's head, patting him. The dog's whole body wiggled.

"Well, I'll be—"

Mrs. Cooney started to speak, and she was not choice with her language. It was apparent that by some mystery of his instinct, or was it his uncanny brain, Brian Boru had decided Donna Madring was a friend.

Mrs. Cooney never completed that rough exclamation. For it seemed that Platinum Nell had been waiting hours for some such opportunity as this.

At the instant Brian Boru's attention had turned unexpectedly to the pretty prisoner on the iron cot, Platinum Nell's jeweled right hand slipped into the bosom of her sleazy dress. She saw that Mrs. Cooney was watching the actions of the dog.

The flame and the explosion from the hand of Platinum Nell came without warning. So quickly, that Mrs. Cooney's huge head only turned slowly on her massive shoulders.

MRS. COONEY'S pale-blue eyes became big and reproachful just before they slowly glazed. And Platinum Nell pulled the trigger of the automatic she had hidden the second time.

Two spots of scarlet appeared on Mrs. Cooney's ample bosom. Blood came to her lips as she said, "You couldn't—I never meant you any harm—I—"

The great body of Mrs. Cooney rolled from the chair across the door as Donna Madring sprang up, attempting to stifle a scream of terror. For Platinum Nell had whipped the automatic around and was pointing it at her.

"You, too, you little, interfering devil!"

Donna Madring screamed then, "No! No! Please! I don't want to die!"

Platinum Nell hissed out an oath and squeezed the trigger. But the bullet never reached the pretty society girl. Donna Madring had thrown herself to one side. The leaden slug whined wickedly from the edge of the iron cot on which she had been lying.

Then a terrible, snarling threat filled the room with that shot. Brian Boru was a flying black projectile. Now it was Platinum Nell's turn to scream with fear.

With one clean leap, Boru flew through the air. His tearing fangs ripped into the flesh of Platinum Nell's soft arm. She was holding the automatic in the other hand. With her scream of pain, Platinum Nell turned the pistol toward the body of the attacking dog.

Again Donna Madring screamed, "No! No!"

Those slim, white hands had caught up a wooden chair. With this she threw herself toward the gun moll, cracking the rungs across the gangster woman's shoulders. There was an awful crunching of Boru's fanged teeth. Then the pistol exploded twice.

Donna Madring let the chair she had used fall from her hands. The blow had swerved the small pistol close to Platinum Nell's own breast. Across her sleazy silk waist appeared a red line, as if drawn there by a swiping brush dipped in blood.

"Oh, I didn't mean to do that! I didn't!"

Donna Madring was crying out. But Brian Boru had shifted the hold of those terrible teeth. They were meeting in the yielding flesh of Platinum Nell's shoulder, very close to her throat.

A small, slowly pulsing geyser of blood appeared from her heart.

Donna Madring had lost all of her fear of the black terrier. Her slim hands clutched his thick, furry coat.

"Don't, Boru! Oh, don't!" came the girl's agonized voice.

Perhaps the vicious Brian Boru had never before obeyed any voice other than that of The Whisperer. Now he released his hold on Platinum Nell as the woman staggered and fell to the floor.

The gun moll attempted twice to arise, but that awful, small geyser of blood continued to pump from her heart. Donna Madring swayed, as if she were about to faint, but there was unsuspected courage in this society girl.

Releasing Brian Boru, who fawned at her side, the girl got Platinum Nell's head into her arms. She tore off part of one of her own undergarments and attempted to stanch the spouting of that scarlet death geyser.

PLATINUM NELL slowly opened her dulling eyes. Her rouged lips parted, and the shining

platinum in her teeth was like the smiling of a death's head.

"It's no use, baby, no use," she murmured. "I guess, after all, you're one swell doll. You'd help me if you could, wouldn't you?"

"Yes! Yes! Please, be quiet! You will be all right! I'll stop the blood some way—some way!"

That death stream was not to be stopped, and Platinum Nell only shook her head feebly.

"Sure, you're a swell doll," she repeated. "Once maybe I coulda been like you, but I got the wrong dice. I'm goin' out, baby. I'm goin' out."

Donna Madring smoothed back the woman's tangled, bleached hair. Her slim fingers touched the coarsely wrinkled skin which this mobster's moll had tried to keep attractive to the last.

"There's something you gotta know, babe," whispered Platinum Nell. "The Whisperer. He knows—he knows—you've got to find The Whisperer, and Wart Dorgan's got him. Something tells me that. I'll tell you where they are—where the bodies never are found—but first, get me a drink— that woman has a flask."

Platinum Nell was dying. The drink from the dead Mrs. Cooney's flask revived her for a few minutes. She prevented Donna Madring from interrupting as her words tumbled together.

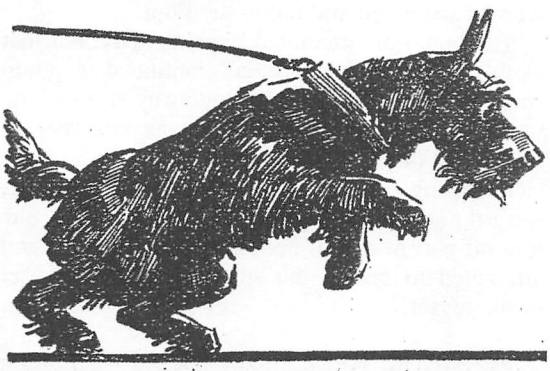
"About that night Hopper Simes was killed—I was there—The Whisperer knows the truth—somehow, you must save The Whisperer—he will make everything all right—"

"Hush, please now, that's enough," sobbed Donna Madring, pillowing the moll's head, heedless of the blood staining her own dress. "I'll get there. I'll save The Whisperer, for I must save Bulldog Knox—don't you see? Now don't talk any more!"

Platinum Nell did not need to be told not to talk any more. Words would not come. Only as her eyes slowly closed, one jeweled hand lifted and touched the society girl's smooth cheek, gently.

Platinum Nell's lips formed the words she could not say.

"Once I was like that—"



BRIAN BORU

Her head drooped, and hot tears poured from Donna Madring's eyes upon the moll's dead face. Bad, a murderess, but how close Donna Madring herself had come to that same fate! How could anyone know what circumstance had made Platinum Nell what she was?

Did Brian Boru know the words that had been spoken?

He was at the door ahead of Donna Madring. The girl's body trembled as she was forced to move the heavy figure of Mrs. Cooney to get the door open.

Brian Boru looked back and waited for the girl. Donna Madring got to the street and, heedless of a taxicab driver's curious glance at her bloodstained shoulders, she gave him an address. Donna Madring had the automatic pistol that had belonged to Platinum Nell.

ABOUT the time Platinum Nell was telling her death story, and The Whisperer and Quick Trigger were undergoing the beginning of what promised to be mutilating torture, if not death, Bulldog Knox was sitting huddled on the bench of the Trador eleven.

Never had there been such an overflowing crowd in the stadium stands. Thunderous roars, cheers, catcalls beat across the field. They fell upon the ears of Bulldog Knox with devastating impact.

Bulldog's eyes were red-rimmed from sleeplessness. His gaze moved again and again to the front boxes. His lips moved, and his rugged face suddenly went white. With his nervous hands pulling a flower to bits, the beady-eyed Dirk Thorton had come into his box.

And, except for his inevitable bodyguards, Dirk Thorton was unaccompanied. Bulldog Knox's lips moved. He was saying, "Where is she? What did they do with her? I've got to do it! I've got to do it! It's the *only* way!"

He was not talking aloud, but as his eyes remained on Dirk Thorton's dapper figure, Bulldog Knox suddenly said, aloud, "And then I'll kill him! That's what I'll do! I'll kill him!"

Bulldog hardly realized his words could be heard. The gray-haired coach slid over to him.

"Listen, Bulldog," he said. "I think I should keep you out of today's game. You gave me your promise. What in Heaven's name is wrong with you, boy?"

"I'll be all right," muttered Bulldog.

His brain was seething as if it were on fire. He knew he would not be all right. But what the coach feared would not happen. There would be no opposing players laid out in today's game.

For Bulldog Knox had different instructions. That had been the big build-up, the determined advance of the Trador eleven to the position of

fighting it out with the Eagles in today's biggest game for the championship.

And Bulldog Knox was fully informed, in fact commanded, that Trador was not to win this championship. That rested on the shoulders of Bulldog Knox alone, and he alone of those on all that vast stadium field knew the reason.

At this time, just before the opening of the game, Deputy Commissioner Henry Bolton hurried into the box occupied by Mayor Van Royston and the upright Stan Fortune.

"We've had no word from Commissioner Gordon, your honor," said Henry Bolton. "After giving that crazy order for the raid on The Boiled Owl last night, he seems to have disappeared. But I've turned all of those fellows loose. We had nothing to hold them on."

"That was right, Henry," approved Mayor Van Royston. "You keep in touch with headquarters. If Commissioner Gordon shows up, he is to come here to my box at once. At last, I have permission from the committee to demand his resignation."

Henry Bolton's round mouth screwed into a pleased O of approval. He would be sitting in the commissioner's chair yet. He glanced at Stan Fortune, and the broker smiled.

Henry Bolton knew that Stan Fortune had a great deal to do with getting the committee around to Commissioner Gordon's resignation.

THE game got underway as Henry Bolton left the mayor's box to keep in touch with headquarters. Bulldog Knox moved with the other Trador players. But there was a sudden hush over the Trador supporters. What was wrong with Bulldog Knox?

Was this the mad quarterback who had filled the sporting columns with stories of his murderous playing in a recent game? Bulldog Knox seemed hardly to realize he was on the playing field.

Perhaps the Eagles players were watchful for the reputed crushing tactics of Bulldog Knox. In the first few minutes of play the ball was swiftly marched toward the Eagles' goal line.

The signal for the side shift and the pass fell upon Bulldog Knox's ears. It registered automatically. When he could, Bulldog had been watching the stands, the boxes. Donna Madring was not there.

Interference freed him for a wide run on the lofted pass. The Eagles' goal was only a short twenty yards away. Only one tackle remained, and he was hardly an obstacle to the smashing Bulldog.

The oval dropped squarely into Bulldog's hands. A mighty cheer started, then changed to a mightier groan. The ball bounced from Bulldog's hands, and an Eagles player fell upon it.

Nothing more of importance happened in the first quarter, but in the second, Bulldog Knox seemed to forget the role he was supposed to be taking. He had the keenest football sense.

Just before the close of the half, he smashed through the line and blocked a pass that would most certainly have scored a touchdown for the Eagles.

Bulldog Knox did not seem to realize this had put him back in favor with the crowd. For between halves, he was reading a folded note that had reached him. And he knew it had come directly from the Dirk Thorton gambling crowd.

Bulldog rolled the note into a ball and stuffed it into his mouth. That note had told him Donna Madring was being held a prisoner. And, said the note:

> IF ANYTHING GOES WRONG IN THIS LAST HALF, YOU AND YOUR SOCIETY SWEETIE WILL GO TO THE CHAIR FOR THE MURDER OF HOPPER SIMES. IF EVERYTHING IS RIGHT, YOU WILL SEE DONNA MADRING SOON AFTER THE GAME.

The whistle blew for the third quarter.

CHAPTER XV
THE GAME OF FEAR

THE note Bulldog Knox had swallowed told the whole story. He had been and was playing a game of fear, of madness. From the opening of the final championship contest, the fast quarterback had been impelled in every play by the sinister threat behind the heavy betting on the short end of the Trador-Eagles battle.

A sinister threat represented by the beady-eyed Dirk Thorton up there in one of the boxes, nervous fingers slowly spilling red petals of a flower he was pulling to pieces. A threat backed by the guards of Dirk Thorton, by others of his crowd scattered throughout the stands.

The gambling element held a secure position. No need in this case for guns to flame and bullets to split the spine of the player they had subjected to their will.

For Dirk Thorton and his aides were convinced all they needed to do was tip off the police to the battle on the rainy night before Hopper Simes had been murdered.

The gamblers had been given an unusual break. Perhaps the honest, stalwart Bulldog Knox would have defied fear for himself, even if he had been convinced he would be accused of murder. But the quarterback had been, for more than a year, madly in love with Donna Madring.

And Bulldog Knox had been informed that the gambling crowd could produce a witness who had seen Donna Madring hurl the flashlight that apparently had caused the death of Hopper Simes. The

pretty society girl would be charged with murder, or so Bulldog Knox was compelled to believe.

That had been accountable for the madness in a previous game. It was the reason he had stood aside with a torn soul while Donna Madring had accompanied Dirk Thorton on that same occasion. As most persons who are of straight character, Bulldog Knox was bewildered, finding no defense for his sweetheart or himself.

True, he had been tipped off to where he would find the drunken, foul-minded Hopper Simes that night. He was even aware that Hopper Simes must have been paid to attack college football and question the standing of Bulldog Knox. But murder was murder.

THE quarterback could not keep back a vision of the lovely Donna Madring being strapped into a chair. There had been a witness, or so the Dirk Thorton crowd had informed him. Bulldog Knox knew a woman who had been with Hopper Simes had disappeared.

Today as the big game surged ahead with some of the queerest breaks ever seen in a major football contest, the fear-maddened Bulldog Knox had no means of knowing that the single witness was already dead. Was lying in a barren room of a tenement district, near the body of another woman she had killed.

Again and again, during a scoreless game, Bulldog Knox managed to break up what might have been touchdown plays. His football instinct was so keenly developed, that in most of this cross playing it was impossible for either officials or his teammates to detect any intentional crookedness.

Thousands in the stands could see the great Bulldog Knox was having an off day. But there were flashes of brilliant playing when they counted little that maintained some faith that before the game ended the speedy Bulldog Knox would break through for a winning gain.

In the box of Mayor Van Royston, the immaculate, dignified Stan Fortune seemed somewhat on edge. Perhaps it was the success he had met in backing the mayor to secure a demand for the resignation of Commissioner Wildcat Gordon.

"This game is going to be won or lost by that crazy Bulldog Knox," remarked Stan Fortune once. "I suppose the break he had with his fiancée has gone to his head. It's unfortunate, for Donna Madring was a fine girl."

"It is strange about her," said Mayor Van Royston. "But the thing on my mind today is what could possibly be happening to Wildcat Gordon? That order he gave last night for the raid on The Boiled Owl is likely to put us in wrong with one whole district. There wasn't the shadow of an excuse for it. Perhaps Gordon was simply using his authority to take petty revenge upon Henry Bolton."

"I'd like to know myself where Gordon has disappeared," said Stan Fortune. "Well, this second half will tell the story of the game."

IT must have been about the time the whistle had sounded for the opening of the epic football game that The Whisperer, using all the strength of his rangy muscles, succeeded in partly loosening a peg which held him to the sliding rock in the underground cavern.

Already the terrible quicklime was within an inch of his drawn-up, bare feet. The Whisperer heard old Quick Trigger emit a groan.

Quicklime does not burn instantly. It is like the touch of a slow-acting acid. But when it bites into human flesh, it destroys. The Whisperer succeeded in freeing one wrist.

Wart Dorgan looked down at him, leering.

"So, you're too smart to talk, huh? Well, Whisperer, as they tag you, I'm sending some of the boys along to see today's nice little football game. By the time that is over, I figure you and your bald-headed friend won't be much use above the ankles. Now what have you done with Platinum Nell and Donna Madring?"

The Whisperer's only reply was a hissed oath. Wart Dorgan drew back one foot and kicked his ribs cruelly. Then he gave an order that sent all but one other man back along the tunnel.

"The boss wants you to be up in the house and await telephone orders," said Wart Dorgan. "If Bulldog Knox slips up, all our dough goes down the chute. Anyway, when the game's over, the boss has an idea it would be smart to have Bulldog Knox disappear."

Wart Dorgan grinned evilly at The Whisperer.

"Maybe you'll be having company about the time there ain't anything left for you to walk on below the knees!" he grated.

So that was it! Not only had this gambling crowd put desperate fear into the souls of Bulldog Knox and his sweetheart, Donna Madring, but they intended there should be no slip-up afterward. The Whisperer could see how smart that would be.

It would be suspected perhaps that Bulldog Knox had thrown today's game. Then, if he vanished, if Donna Madring herself also disappeared, it would be permitted to leak out that the pair were facing charges of murder in the death of Hopper Simes.

Dirk Thorton was The Whisperer's thought. The man who had engineered the murder of Detective Tim O'Rourke. The man who had paid off Inspector Barthold. But there must be another brain in all of this. A big-money brain.

The Whisperer thought desperately of the bank notes with their consecutive serial numbers in the penthouse of old Quick Trigger. Of the torn, bloody bill taken from the hand of the slain Jack McGregor.

That money pointed directly to a big-money brain.

Of little service now. No matter what he might reveal t o this crowd, the quicklime vat would claim its toll.

The rock continued its slow sliding. Only Wart Dorgan and one other hard-eyed guard remained near the rock. Apparently, they were content to wait news from the big game.

Perhaps Dirk Thorton had ordered The Whisperer kept alive until he could personally attend his slow execution.

The Whisperer had one hand free now. Cautiously, he slid it across his body, attempted to reach the cords binding his other arm. At that instant, the sharp eyes of Wart Dorgan caught his movement.

WITH an oath, the mobster sprang upon the oozy rock. The Whisperer tried to trap one of his ankles with his free hand. Wart Dorgan ground a heavy heel into his wrist.

"Thought you'd pull one, huh?" he jeered, slashing his knuckles across The Whisperer's mouth.

His hands started to pull the cords of the free hand back into place.

"It'll be funny, listenin' to you spill what we want to know when there ain't nothin' but the top part of you left to talk!" he grated.

The other guard slid onto the moving rock, examined the cords around Quick Trigger's wrists. He was bending over, intent upon this, when The Whisperer's sharp ears detected the soft padding of feet somewhere in the darkness of the tunnel nearby.

The padding seemed to be coming from the direction of the tunnel entrance, through the duck blind at the outside pond.

The Whisperer could not employ a loud tone of voice. But his eerie, sibilant whisper could be shaped into oaths that filled all the space around him with a hissing.

The Whisperer began cursing Wart Dorgan. It brought slapping knuckles again and again across his face; but each time he was struck, he only hissed louder. Perhaps old Quick Trigger got the idea.

The old ex-deputy started swearing loudly. There was quite a commotion on the sliding rock. The Whisperer slowly turned his head. He saw two moving eyes like burning coals of fire. Then, just back of these eyes, higher up, appeared the white blot of a face.

For the minute, the padding of the feet had been covered by The Whisperer and Quick Trigger. But there was a sudden, little cry in the voice of a girl.

Wart Dorgan reared up on the slippery rock. He had not yet succeeded in pinning down The Whisperer's free hand. Wart Dorgan was getting a rod from under an arm when a black ball of snarling fury hit him. Hit him and slashed with fangs that were like pointed knives.

Wart Dorgan's feet slipped. The Whisperer saw him falling, toppling backward toward the seething pit of the deadly quicklime. The black Scottish terrier had sunk his teeth somewhere near the man's throat.

"Down, Boru, down!" came The Whisperer's command.

For he knew the fierce, loyal dog would hang on until death. If he went into that quicklime vat, there would be no saving him. The smart terrier no doubt was bewildered by this strange order, but his fangs released Wart Dorgan.

The dog dropped flat-footed to the sliding rock and prevented his furry body from slipping over the edge.

Wart Dorgan's scream was an awful sound. It was not yet one of pain, so much as it was the horror of the knowledge that filled his crooked soul. For his heavy body splashed into the quicklime vat. His terrible scream was almost instantly smothered by the deadly mixture that he perhaps had helped prepare.

The other guard had whipped out his rod. He fired once, a bullet screaming toward the top of the cavern from the rock close to Brian Boru. The dog attempted to spring, but the oozy rock caused him to slide.

There was the tense cry of a girl, Donna Madring's frightened voice. No doubt, the girl's hands were trembling. Possibly it was scared reaction that caused her to grip the automatic she had taken from Platinum Nell.

Donna Madring did not even know there was a bullet left in the gun. Platinum Nell had fired that small automatic five times. A cartridge left in the chamber exploded.

The guard on the sliding rock seemed to be looking at the slender, pale-faced girl with eyes that

had ceased to see. His body sagged across old Quick Trigger.

THE WHISPERER then witnessed the astounding sight of the dainty Donna Madring on the oozy rock, gathering the small form of Brian Boru into her arms. The Whisperer could see dried blood staining the society girl's clothing.

But most of all, he hissed his amazement at the unbelievable response of his fierce, man-killing Scottish terrier. Brian Boru snuggled close to the girl, his red tongue licking her chin. His black, furry body wiggled, and he whimpered with delight.

"Hellamighty!" came from The Whisperer. "Don't wait to talk now, for the others will be down upon us! But no wonder Bulldog Knox is in love with you!"

Before the prisoners were free and off the rock, feet were pounding from the direction of the gambling residence. The Whisperer led the way back toward the exit through the duck blind. He and Quick Trigger had managed to seize and restore their shoes.

The taxicab driver who had brought Donna Madring there was hard-boiled, and he hadn't liked this setup in the least. But there were few who could have resisted the appeal of Donna Madring when she smiled.

The Whisperer saw the others through the duck blind and up to the road. All were in the taxicab when bullets started hammering.

But the taxi driver had the advantage of the Dirk Thorton guards being compelled to get around to three cars parked near the millionaire estate residence above the tunnel.

The guards' cars took up pursuit half a mile in the rear.

"Take care of the little girl, Quick Trigger!" ordered The Whisperer. "Stay away from the football stadium for an hour!"

CHAPTER XVI
THE ELUSIVE WHISPERER

THE WHISPERER whipped from the moving taxicab. So swift was his action, he could not have been observed by the three mob cars just getting into high speed half a mile behind.

The Whisperer glided into a bushy ditch filled with stony rubble. The taxicab slid away, disappearing around a bend in the road toward the city.

The three cars of the gambling mob were moving fast and close together. The driver of the first car was stepping up to sixty or better on the road leading to the main highway. This driver suddenly let go of the steering wheel.

The man's hands flew up and he yelled. A round rubble rock, the size of a man's fist, thudded into his skull over one ear and bounded into the back of the car. There were four men in the leading automobile.

None had a chance to grab the steering wheel or move from his place. As the driver sagged in his seat, the fast-moving sedan went out of control. It shot across the road, its front end rearing up an embankment. The tires of the two following cars squealed as they were blocked.

Cursing men poured from all three cars. Only the driver of the first car had been injured. In the seconds required to determine what had happened, The Whisperer was moving back toward the gambling resort with the lithe speed of a cat.

As the taxicab had flashed away from the place, he had seen his own roadster parked some distance from the Dirk Thorton place. It had been brought there when he and Quick Trigger had been captured.

The Whisperer found another side road out of the estate. But a minute or two of delay in getting the roadster started brought men pouring from the Dirk Thorton resort. The little car got going as others of the gambling mob were whirring their starters.

Few men could or would have driven as The Whisperer drove. The roadster was geared to high speed. Though he maintained a lead on his pursuers, The Whisperer managed to get several articles from concealed pockets of the roadster.

At the same time, the car clock showed him the big game between Trador and the Eagles must now be in its second half. The Whisperer hissed, "If I make it, there'll be the funniest ending to a game that stadium has ever seen!"

It seemed he could have distanced two cars filled with men that now were on his tail. But The Whisperer smiled and deliberately cut the speed of the little car, enough to permit the others to keep him in view.

His purpose in that brought a ghostly chuckle to this man in gray who had faced torture and terrible death in a quicklime pit.

INSIDE the big football stadium the game of the year was going into its fourth and final quarter as The Whisperer's small car skidded through the oily dust around the space where hundreds of other cars were parked. Two gang cars were booming down the highway, less than a hundred yards behind the man in gray.

There was, no doubt, desperate determination among Dirk Thorton's men to kill The Whisperer before he could reach the stadium. Perhaps none knew what he might be planning, but they were aware he had held Platinum Nell prisoner and captured Donna Madring.

In the haste of their pursuit, none of the crowd had

been given an opportunity to communicate with Dirk Thorton in the grandstand box. Now the cursing gangsters in the two cars saw The Whisperer's roadster crash into a pole near the parking lot.

The mobsters skidded their cars to a stop. They saw the gray-clad figure leap from the roadster. There seemed no escape, for the highway near the stadium was lined with small refreshment stands.

The pursuers were in no position to begin shooting. They believed they were close enough to surround The Whisperer before he could slip away. They dashed across the highway as they saw their quarry vanish between two hot-dog stands.

As The Whisperer passed between these stands, he was under the big outside columns supporting the stadium grandstand. The soft drink and refreshment concessions were sheltered by the stand itself.

The Whisperer saw a lone man in one of the hot-dog stands. He abruptly pivoted and reversed his direction. The proprietor of the hot-dog stand faced him with his mouth already opening in a shout of surprise.

The hot-dog man may have thought this was some kind of a holdup. He had little time to give the matter consideration. One hard fist of The Whisperer rapped him accurately on the chin. The man went down and he was out cold.

The Whisperer ducked under the counter. He could hear the Dirk Thorton mobsters ramming about, looking into possible places of concealment.

From The Whisperer's mouth came his curious dental plates. The articles of clothing he had retrieved from the concealed pockets of his roadster went into place. The Whisperer listened intently.

Other proprietors of the stands were running outside, curious as to the strange pursuit they had seen. From the vicinity of one of the hot-dog booths walked a figure that few in the city could not identify.

Police Commissioner Wildcat Gordon had his Army hat cocked pertly over one eye. A new red necktie affronted all good taste in dress. A vivid carnation was in his coat lapel, and yellow shoes set off a suit of brown checks. None could have known that same suit could, within seconds, be turned into gray.

Inside the big stadium the thousands roared. Wildcat Gordon saw some of Dirk Thorton's men run past him. They slowed their pace abruptly as they saw the police commissioner. It would not be so well to be questioned as to their present pursuit of the elusive Whisperer.

As the crowd continued its roaring, Wildcat Gordon asked a concession man a question.

"They're in the fourth quarter, and the score's still nothing to nothing," said this man. "They haven't got many minutes to go."

In one of those minutes, Wildcat Gordon was on the telephone.

"Sergeant Thorsen," he said, calmly, "you will order all nearby squad cars to the football stadium. Get over here yourself. Now here is what I want you to do."

Wildcat talked rapidly for another half a minute. He walked from the telephone booth and passed directly through the main entrance to the stadium. But he did not ascend the stairs. Three uniformed coppers, and two plainclothes men were near the entrance.

"Come along!" snapped Wildcat Gordon. "We're taking a little hand in the big game!"

ABOUT this time there was sudden confusion in Dirk Thorton's grandstand box. One of his outside men had come in. He probably had imparted information of The Whisperer's escape. Dirk Thorton's nervous fingers pulled a flower to bits, but he sat tight.

On the field, the fourth quarter had seesawed. Now the ball was on the Eagles' thirty-yard line. Bulldog Knox heard the signal for the shift and the pass. He knew there was less than five minutes to play.

Twice he had gotten away with poor reception of passes. He was aware the crucial play was at hand. He could almost feel the indrawn breath of eighty thousand persons as the backs shifted and the signal was called.

Every eye in that huge amphitheater was upon Bulldog Knox. The desperate, heartsick quarterback felt he had no way out. Within the next few minutes he would be one of the most hated men in all of the big city. No doubt, the scandal of it would be spread over the front pages within the following hour.

Bulldog Knox saw a man hurry into Dirk Thorton's box, not far from the sideline. He could see the decorated box of Mayor Van Royston, the formation being made close by.

Bulldog's bloodshot eyes had ceased searching for Donna Madring. He had been informed she was a prisoner. His lips formed the inaudible words, "I'll kill him—I'll kill him!"

Dirk Thorton was tearing a flower to pieces.

Suddenly, Bulldog Knox stiffened. Something like a piece of ice slid down his spine. Three policemen in uniform and three others were pushing past the game officials onto the field.

The man with an Army hat drawn over one eye was walking straight toward him. Bulldog Knox had seen the pictures of Wildcat Gordon many times. This was the police commissioner himself.

A whistle, halting the formation of play, blew shrilly.

Up in Mayor Van Royston's box, the mayor jerked out, "Wildcat Gordon! Now what in time is he about to do? Of all the places to pick for his antics! I'll have—"

"You'd better stop him!" snapped the brittle voice of Stan Fortune. "It's enough that he fails to get criminals, but we cannot have him make a public spectacle of the city government!"

CHAPTER XVII
THE CHARGE IS MURDER

COMMISSIONER WILDCAT GORDON strode toward the group of breathless football players. Coaches of both teams, officials, hurried over to him. In the breathless hush over the vast crowd came the wailing of police squad car sirens outside the stadium.

"What's this? What's this?" said one of the officials.

"Yes, Commissioner Gordon, what's the trouble?" came the worried voice of the gray-haired Trador coach.

Wildcat Gordon lifted his hand. His incisive, commanding voice carried clearly to those nearest in the stands. "I am arresting Bulldog Knox for the murder of Hopper Simes!" stated Wildcat.

Bulldog Knox stared at Wildcat Gordon. All the strength seemed to go out of his body, but he was muttering, almost unconsciously, "Just me? Just me?"

Wildcat Gordon stepped close to Bulldog Knox. He let brittle, commanding words fall from his lips. They reached only those nearest to the pair. One uniformed policeman had a hand on Bulldog's shoulder.

"Get in there, Bulldog Knox, in this last four minutes and play football as you never played it before!" snapped Wildcat. "You are already under arrest for murder, but you'll finish this game! And now you can finish it on the square, no matter what happens after that!"

The quarterback's face became a white mask. His muddy hands showed white-gripped knuckles.

"Tell me," he said, hoarsely, "if there is no other?"

Wildcat Gordon's colorless eyes seemed to warm with inward fire.

"Donna Madring is safe, Bulldog," he said, quietly. "Now put that leather over that line! You will be protected! That was it, the murder charge threat, wasn't it?"

Bulldog Knox nodded, but his jaw had taken on a new set.

"But we cannot—" one of the officials started to say.

"I'm police commissioner of this city!" rapped Wildcat Gordon. "Don't tell *me I cannot!* I'll see this game is finished if I have to arrest the whole damned lot of you!"

UNIFORMED men from arriving squad cars were pouring from the entrances. The wooden-faced Sergeant Thorsen had arrived. The coppers moved like an army, like Wildcat Gordon desired his men to move. Their lines hedged in the field, ringed the goal post of the Eagles thirty yards away.

The megaphones were working now. Never before had a stadium crowd been given a thrill equal to this. A star accused of murder, under arrest, guarded by an army of coppers, was about to take that leather oval in the final three minutes of play!

Then it was that the dignified, high and mighty Stan Fortune climbed with Mayor Van Royston from his box. Fortune removed his gold glasses as he walked toward Wildcat Gordon. The broker had the air of a citizen about to do something far beneath his dignity.

"Mayor Van Royston is stopping this burlesque, this intolerable melodrama, Commissioner Gordon!" stated Stan Fortune, towering above the five feet five of the quiet Wildcat. "No such exhibition of our city government will be permitted and—"

One of Wildcat's fists ripped out and upward. His other fist followed it with a punch that almost removed one of Stan Fortune's ribs. Another smash, and the aristocratic nose of the influential broker burst into a flood of red.

Mayor Van Royston gasped, put out a protesting hand.

"This is my show, mayor!" snapped Wildcat. "You'll do well to return to your box and keep out of this! Your friend, Stan Fortune, is under arrest for interfering with the law! Put the bracelets on him, sergeant!"

The crowd roared. Here was something more than a mere football show! Worth all of the highly speculative prices some of the customers had paid for their seats!

Mayor Van Royston seemed awed by the fiery Wildcat Gordon. The spectacle of the high and mighty Stan Fortune, handcuffs on his wrists and blood running from his nose, was to the mayor one of those things that simply couldn't happen!

"I'm telling you, Gordon, I'm telling you!" flared Mayor Van Royston, "this is the last straw! I'm going to ask you to resign! I've got the authority!"

"Ask me about it when this game is over!" snapped Wildcat.

THE two elevens again were in formation. In Dirk Thorton's box there was subdued opinion expressed.

"Anyway," stated Dirk Thorton, "we may lose our shirts if Bulldog Knox has the nerve to shove that ball across, but the police have found out just what we wanted known about Hopper Simes' killing. That makes us clear enough there."

The players broke from position and the ball was snapped back. The first defense of the Eagles was removed. But the nerves of both teams no doubt had been given a shaking. It was the first time they had played shoulder to shoulder with anyone under arrest for murder.

The vast crowd scarcely breathed. Bulldog Knox had become a precise machine. He shot like an arrow into the side shift. The ball was faked over, and the back set himself for the throw.

Tense with the drama, the crowd groaned. For the throw was wild. The oval arose erratically, started dropping many yards from Bulldog Knox. Two of the Eagles men were almost directly under the falling leather.

The groan of the thousands became a crescendo yell. It seemed incredible that human feet could have taken on such speed. Bulldog Knox was a plunging bullet. One of the Eagles was turned, end over end, as he frantically attempted to tackle the plunging quarterback.

Bulldog Knox seemed to step on the other man. One outstretched hand reached for the ball. The fingertips touched it. Then Bulldog actually appeared to shoot forward, balancing the oval for at least ten yards on precarious fingers.

The next shout from the stands shook the air. Bulldog Knox had the leather tucked under his arm. None knew how close to the final second the play had come. A whistle shrilled almost as Bulldog was in the air. But the ball was on the ground behind the Eagles' line at almost actual stopwatch clocking of the finish of the game.

The big game was over. The victorious Trador players fell back. Once before, Bulldog Knox had won for them. His madness had caused him to be shunned. Now he stood there, a grimy, white-faced boy, charged with murder!

The gray-haired Trador coach said, "Boys, I don't care! Bring Bulldog Knox back to the showers as a hero should ride!"

THERE was a roaring rush of the players. Bulldog Knox was swept to husky shoulders. Tears were streaming down women's cheeks in the stands. The hero, a hero charged with murder, was being borne down the field by his teammates!

Around this tight-marching group uniformed police formed an escort. None noticed the raging Stan Fortune shaking his hands, waving the steel bracelets.

"I'll break every man in the department for this!" he was shouting.

But those in the stands nearest the Dirk Thorton box saw the beady-eyed gambler and his guards start to move from their box. Perhaps few there were aware that Dirk Thorton and one other man had just seen a fortune, a desperate gambling fortune ride from them on the valiant play of Bulldog Knox.

But the crowd suddenly stopped moving. What was happening down there?

Wildcat Gordon, followed by Sergeant Thorsen, was coming over the edge of Dirk Thorton's box. Half a dozen plainclothes men were closing in. One of the bodyguards made a quick snatch for a gun.

Sergeant Thorsen's blunt fist caught him under the ear.

Wildcat Gordon's terrible hands caught Dirk Thorton's shoulders and twisted him around. There was a sporting editor with a loudspeaker microphone in the next box. Wildcat slapped the gambler over the side. He jerked him before the microphone.

The crowd's voice hushed as Wildcat's metallic tones reached thousands of ears.

"You're under arrest, Dirk Thorton, for the brutal murder of Hopper Simes! Your attempt to frame the crime upon Bulldog Knox and Donna Madring missed fire when your only witness, Platinum Nell, talked just before she died!

"You are also charged with the murder of Detective Tim O'Rourke, and in that same connection we are holding your silent partner, Stan Fortune!"

Not a voice uttered a sound. Not a foot shuffled. Then again came Wildcat's piercing voice.

"Let it be known, so far as the police department is concerned, Bulldog Knox and Donna Madring are entirely exonerated of Hopper Simes' murder!"

Dirk Thorton, Stan Fortune and a dozen others had been rounded up and were being led from the field.

IN the Trador shower rooms stood old Quick Trigger. Beside him was the beautiful Donna Madring. The doll-like Tiny Traeger was holding the society girl's hand.

Then, suddenly, Donna Madring was sobbing in the arms of Bulldog Knox.

Wildcat Gordon said to old Quick Trigger, "I think it's our move to get out of here."

"Yeah, it's all worked out," said old Quick Trigger. "All because Dirk Thorton had to tear up a flower out there on the road when Hopper Simes had the back of his head caved in. If The Whisperer hadn't discovered what really caused Hopper Simes's death, it might have sent Donna Madring and Bulldog over the road."

"Hardly that," grinned Wildcat. "My friend, The Whisperer saw where Hopper Simes had walked, following the car of Bulldog Knox as it drove

away. He died of a blow that broke his neck. So Bulldog Knox couldn't have been there when that happened."

"But this Stan Fortune, Wildcat? That'll be tough!"

"No tougher than his explaining how a hundred thousand dollars in serial rotation, issued by The Merchants' National Bank to Stan Fortune's office, happened to get scattered in three different places. Inspector Barthold had some of it. The Whisperer got some others of the same series being used in the ticket speculation, and Stan Fortune was using his influence to have whole blocks of football tickets placed in the hands of Dirk Thorton.

"When they are matched up with the fragment of a bloody bank note in the hands of the dead Jack McGregor, I'm afraid Stan Fortune's influence won't get much further than his fellow convicts."

Donna Madring was talking breathlessly to Bulldog Knox.

"I tell you, we're not waiting!" the society girl was saying. "Just as you are, in that uniform, we are going to be married!"

Bulldog Knox kissed the girl's curving lips.

Tiny Traeger snuggled suddenly closer to Wildcat Gordon.

"Don't you ever get ideas, Wildcat?" she murmured.

"Ideas?" snapped Wildcat. "I've got an idea Quick Trigger and I can use some hot, strong coffee! A child your age that gets an idea she's old enough to go out with the boys, ought to have a spanking!"

Old Quick Trigger grinned to himself. He knew Tiny had no idea of going out with any boys. Wildcat Gordon might be a smart, hard copper, but there were times when he seemed remarkably dumb.

THE END

INTERLUDE by Will Murray

Wildcat Gordon returns in two gripping novels that could only have appeared in the pages of Street & Smith's *The Whisperer!*

One of the elements that made the exploits of The Whisperer unique was the indisputable fact that Police Commissioner James "Wildcat" Gordon oversaw the police force of a city that had an unmistakably seedy side. It smacks of Chicago, Detroit, or any other crime-ridden, post-Prohibition Depression-era metropolis of the 1930s.

Writer Laurence Donovan went out of his way to never name the city where The Whisperer prowled by night. And Donovan's editor at Street & Smith, John L. Nanovic, aided and abetted by obscuring it further.

Few substantial clues can be found in the two novels chosen to comprise this latest Whisperer volume. A passing reference to Ocean Turnpike in *The Football Racketeers* suggests that the nameless metropolis is a coastal city. But does it lie on the East coast—or the West? "Clifford Goodrich" never says.

Like the Manhattan of *The Shadow Magazine*, the disreputable side of town boasts its colorfully named reformed speakeasies turned legit beer joints. The Boiled Owl is Donovan's version of the Black Ship or the Pink Rat of Shadow fame. No doubt Donovan, a notorious imbiber of alcohol, both legal and illicit, was well acquainted with all types of saloons and similar shady haunts back in that day. The title of this particular establishment was undoubtedly derived from the old phrase, "drunk as a boiled owl."

No doubt *The Football Racketeers*, first published in the December 1936 issue of *The Whisperer*, was the idea of John L. Nanovic; as a graduate of Notre Dame, he was a big fan of their famed football team, the Fighting Irish.

In those Depression days, football was primarily a college sport. Although the National Football League was founded in the 1920s, its counterpart, the American Football League and the wildly popular Super Bowl lay far, far in the future. For many decades, professional football was largely confined to the Midwest, and a handful of East Coast cities like New York and Philadelphia, and did not catch on nationally until the 1960s. College football was where the action predominated. There were also Army and Navy teams, as well as teams representing various military academies. Then as now, illegal betting troubled this all-American activity, casting a cloud over its collegiate glory.

"Fixing" college sports was a criminal activity that never attracted the attention of The Shadow. Nor would Doc Savage have involved himself in such sordid doings.

It's not as if Doc or The Shadow *couldn't* have tackled a case such as *The Football Racketeers*, but the scale of these crimes was too modest, perhaps too mundane, for their superior skills. They were fantasy figures of a type far different from the vice-busting Whisperer.

Doc Savage would have left the problem of throwing college football games to local authorities. No less than an entire industry, if not the world, had to be at risk to motivate the Man of Bronze.

The Shadow might have bothered with a crime of this sort, but it seemed small potatoes when he

could better spend his evening busting up Red Mike's, or some other gangland haunt. Besides, the Dark Avenger preferred to operate after sundown. Night football games were not played back in those days. Can you imagine The Shadow flitting about the gridiron? Or Walter B. Gibson writing columns of pulp-style football game action?

But hoodlums and gambling were perfect meat for Wildcat Gordon. And what interested Gordon, soon drew the attention of his alter ego, The Whisperer.

But that was the appeal of The Whisperer's exploits: He ventured into realistic territory where other pulp heroes did not go.

Reading *The Football Racketeers*—which is one of the best of Donovan's earliest Whisperer cases—we can glimpse another clue to Wildcat Gordon's half-familiar stamping grounds. It was a college town. Although with seats of learning equipped with names like Harton and Trador, one would be a long time decoding which actual universities they might represent. If any!

Although written as the fourth Whisperer novel, editor Nanovic appeared to think so highly of this tale that he moved it ahead in the queue and published it in the third issue of the magazine. Either that, or he wanted it to hit newsstands at the height of the Fall football season, which was traditionally Thanksgiving Day. This led to a little continuity juggling, which we detailed in the Whisperer volume reprinting *The Six Pyramids of Death* and *Mansion of the Missing*, because at the end of the former story, The Whisperer was thought by the world to be dead. Fat chance.

With this story, Donovan seems to have found his "Clifford Goodrich" voice—a blend of Warner Bros. cinematic mood and hard-boiled pulp stylings, seasoned with a near-reportorial narrative approach that came to Donovan naturally after more than a decade of journalistic experience working for numerous newspapers around the nation. And so The Whisperer series at last coalesces into the dark, distinctive tone that sets it apart from all others. Love him or loathe him, Wildcat Gordon was a man of his time, a traditional hard-bitten police official with a heart of gold and a brass knuckles approach to criminals.

Wildcat Gordon also kept the law in a town that boasted its own amusement park, as we discover in *Murder in Crazyland*, published six months later in the July, 1937 *Whisperer*.

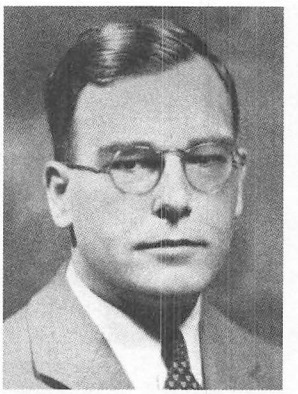
Back in those pre-Disneyland days, amusement parks were either static places like Brooklyn's famed Coney Island, or traveling carnivals which moved from town to town, the rides and concession stands designed to be dismantled and erected at each stop. Many of the latter were on the shady side, especially the midway games of chance, which had a reputation for being rigged in favor of the operators.

Prior to World War II, Coney Island, then consisting of three separate attractions—Luna Park,

Whisperer editor John L. Nanovic

Dreamland and Steeplechase Park—was the biggest amusement center in the nation. Its Wonder Wheel Ferris wheel and Cyclone roller coaster were world renowned. No doubt Crazyland took much of its ambiance from Coney Island.

A colorful locality such as Crazyland might seem a perfect place for characters like The Shadow to go prowling. And it was. Back in 1934, the Master of Darkness tackled a *Crime Circus* in the novel of that title. Its author, Walter B. Gibson, once performed stage magic in a traveling carnival, and employed his knowledge of what went on behind the scenes to great advantage in that story.



Theodore Tinsley

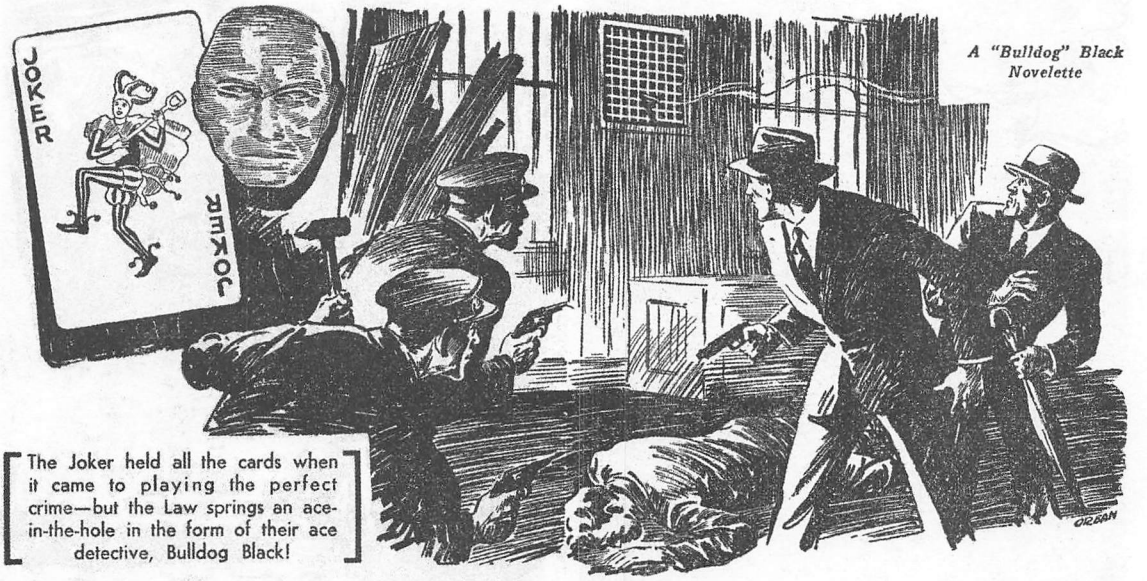
It's possible that either Gibson or John Nanovic harkened back to that story in helping Laurence Donovan formulate *Murders in Crazyland*. Either way, it makes a wonderfully atmospheric backdrop for one of Wildcat Gordon's most bizarre forays against the criminal element. And you would never guess that by the time he was nine novels into this series, Donovan also alternated on the seagoing adventures of Captain John Fury of the *Whirlwind* in the pages of S&S's *Skipper* magazine. There, he wrote as "Wallace Brooker."

Future pulp and comic book heroes freely borrowed this background. In 1950, The Phantom cracked a case entitled *The Happyland Murders* in the pages of *The Phantom Detective*. We know that Batman's co-creator Bill Finger was a faithful reader of *The Whisperer*—where do you think Commissioner Gordon came from?—so it's no surprise to find a somewhat similar Batman story published in *Detective Comics* #51, May 1941, called "The Case of the Mystery Carnival."

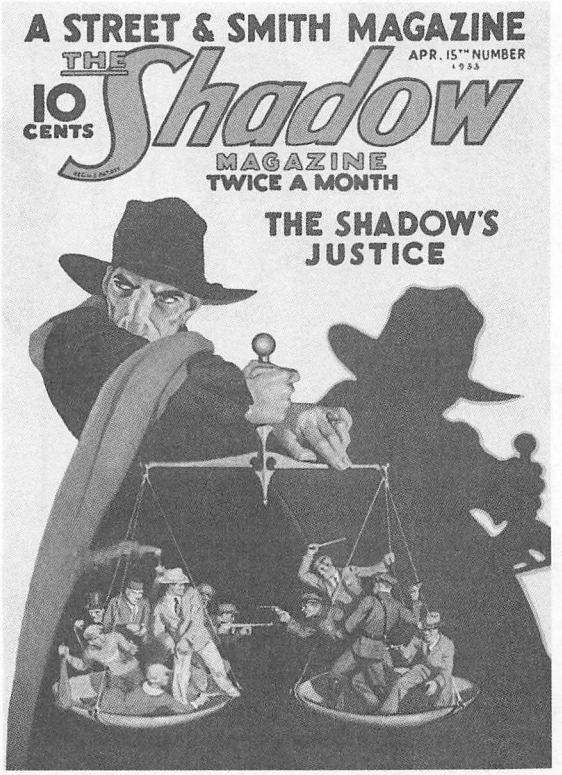
Both outfits are run by colorful Kentucky-style "colonels"—but that may be a simple pulp cliché and not a clear example of direct influence. As weird as the early Batman stories were, *Murders in Crazyland* is an excursion in the macabre side of murder undreamed of by Bob Kane and Finger. It would have made a wonderfully moody Warner Bros. film—had that production company been committing pulp horror stories to celluloid back in the mid-1930s. And let's not forget that Laurence Donovan modeled James Gordon on the great Jimmy Cagney!

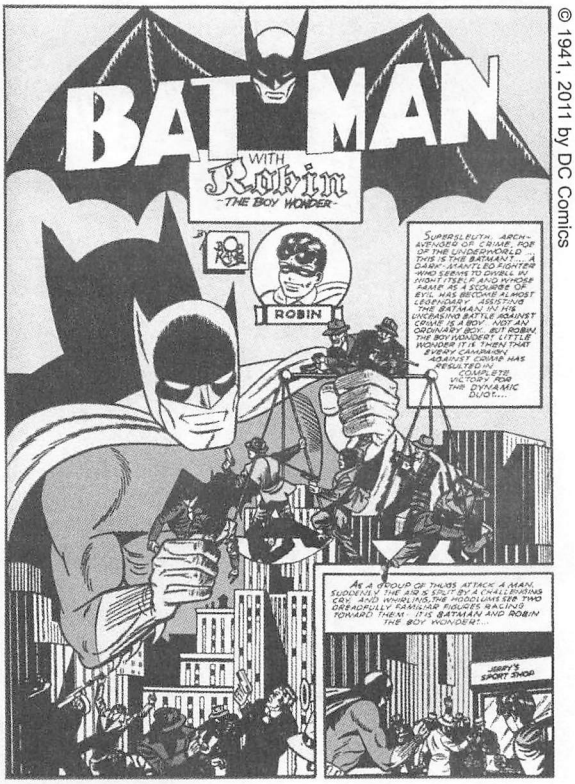
The carnival shakedown angle of this story may have inspired the origin of Robin, who had watched as his aerialist parents were murdered in mid-act by mobsters. After all, one of Bill Finger's proposed names for Batman's Boy Wonder was—Wildcat!

This was also the issue of *The Whisperer* that contained Theodore Tinsley's novelette, "The Grim Joker," in which his series hero, Detective Terry "Bulldog" Black, battled a white-faced arch-criminal who called himself The Joker. Whether this influenced the three men who participated in the creation of the Clown Prince of Crime—Bob Kane, Bill Finger and Jerry Robinson—remains an open question. But given how much of Batman



THE GRIM JOKER By Theodore Tinsley





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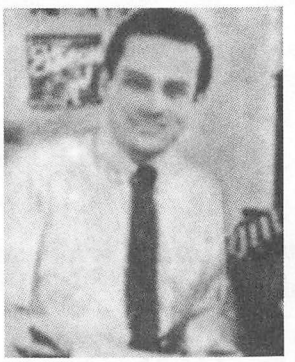
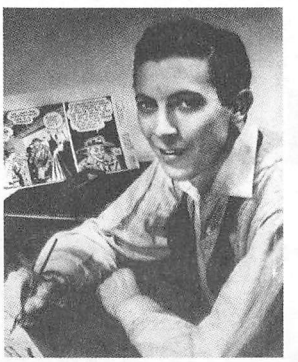
was purloined from The Shadow and The Whisperer—including his premier adventure, "The Case of the Chemical Syndicate" which was a bald retelling of Tinsley's 1936 Shadow novel, *Partners of Peril*—anything is possible.

In any case, Batman returned to battle carny crimes in later stories like 1959's "Peril at Playland Isle," among others. Even The Shadow took another shot at the idea in 1944's *Freak Show Murders*. Again, Walter Gibson did the honors.

And to return to the Whisperer-Batman connection, an untitled tale of the Caped Crusader first published in *Batman* #4 back in 1941 pitted the Dynamic Duo against a vicious gambling czar determined to sabotage a professional football game in which his team was playing. But the two stories are very different in treatment. A disguised Batman takes to the field to substitute for a kidnapped star quarterback. The splash page of this story—depicting a giant symbolic Batman holding the scales of justice as tiny criminals fired away at him—was borrowed from the famous 1933 George Rozen Shadow portrait illustrating *The Shadow's Justice*.



Bill Finger

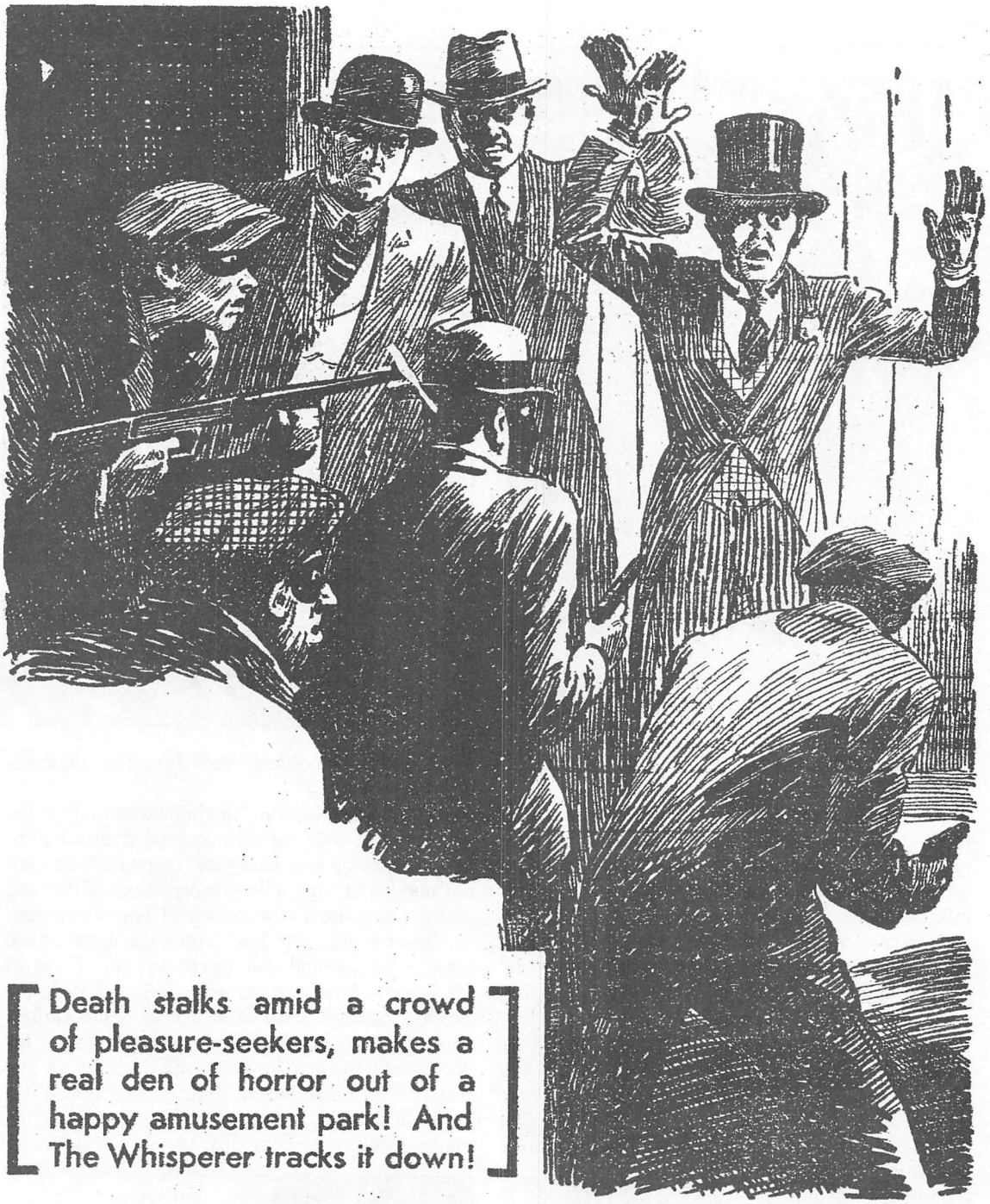


Bob Kane

Artist John Newton Howitt's depiction of the Gray Wraith with his vicious supersilenced automatics towering over Crazyland might have inspired any number of larger-than-life depictions of Batman, and so many other descendants of The Whisperer.

Unfortunately, we don't know the name of the artist who painted the cover to *The Football Racketeers*. It may be the work of Tom Lovell, the Shadow interior artist who executed the earliest Whisperer covers. But we can safely rule out his successor, Howitt. The flat black background that was part of his signature style is absent. Could it be Modest Stein, or John A. Caughlin, one of the many artists who provided covers for Street & Smith's *Detective Story Magazine*?

In our next volume, we will again explore connections between The Whisperer and Batman with two riveting cases, *School for Murder* and *Murder on the Line*, in which we meet the only Whisperer cast member to die in the line of duty! •

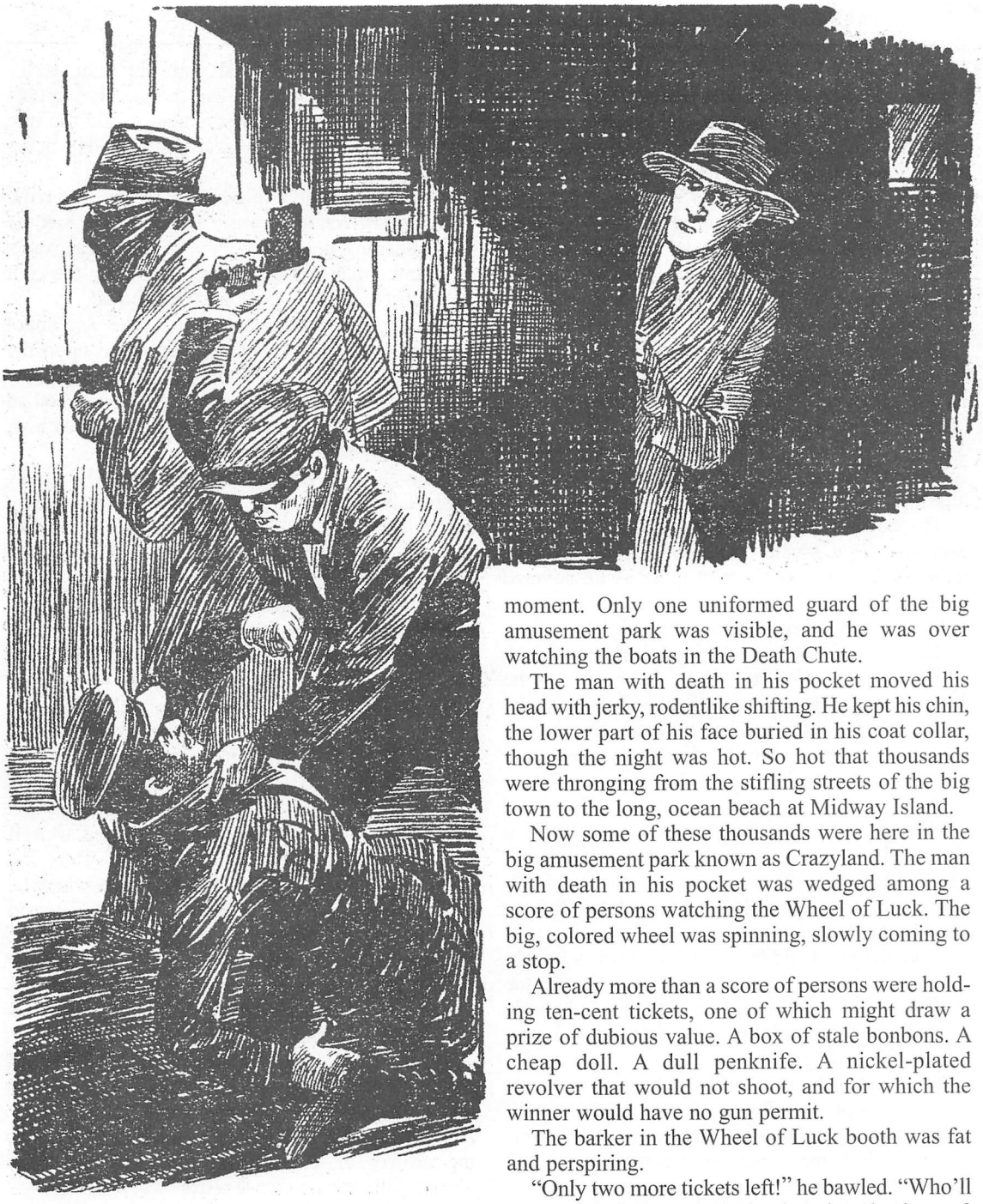


[Death stalks amid a crowd of pleasure-seekers, makes a real den of horror out of a happy amusement park! And The Whisperer tracks it down!]

Murders In Crazyland

An exciting, pulse-stirring novel filled with danger and carnival color

By CLIFFORD GOODRICH



CHAPTER I
DEATH IN HIS POCKET

DEATH was in the side pocket of the sleekly dressed human rat. The only evidence of this was his right hand thrust carelessly into the side of his loose coat. None noticed that his hat brim was pulled down to conceal the darting, furtive glances he shot at the faces about him.

His cautious scrutiny went beyond those crowding close to him. Not a copper in sight at the moment. Only one uniformed guard of the big amusement park was visible, and he was over watching the boats in the Death Chute.

The man with death in his pocket moved his head with jerky, rodentlike shifting. He kept his chin, the lower part of his face buried in his coat collar, though the night was hot. So hot that thousands were thronging from the stifling streets of the big town to the long, ocean beach at Midway Island.

Now some of these thousands were here in the big amusement park known as Crazyland. The man with death in his pocket was wedged among a score of persons watching the Wheel of Luck. The big, colored wheel was spinning, slowly coming to a stop.

Already more than a score of persons were holding ten-cent tickets, one of which might draw a prize of dubious value. A box of stale bonbons. A cheap doll. A dull penknife. A nickel-plated revolver that would not shoot, and for which the winner would have no gun permit.

The barker in the Wheel of Luck booth was fat and perspiring.

"Only two more tickets left!" he bawled. "Who'll grab 'em and kiss lady luck when the wheel stops? Somebody's got to win!"

"Yeah. Somebody's gotta win."

The man with his hand in his pocket croaked the words in his own throat. None but himself heard them. He was a human rat of the lowest order. Ranged close to the Wheel of Luck booth were heads of families, women, a few children.

The man with death in his pocket stood well back in the crowd. The blast of a bomb could not reach him here through the packed human flesh between him and the booth. In the panic that would

follow a blast, he would be only one of jamming hundreds of a mob getting away from the scene.

The Wheel of Luck was near the end of its spin. It would not complete another revolution. The crowd hushed, watching tensely. Ticket holders consulted their numbers. Now was the time.

All eyes were riveted upon the wheel. None would see the hand come from the pocket, none would be able to recall later—even if they dared—the description of the man whose long arm now whipped over his head.

A small, round, black bomb was raised high over the man's head. His arm and wrist snapped back for the throw. There was the minor detail of a pin clicking. No chance was being taken on a bomb to be exploded by impact. The missile might hit a soft spot there among the rows of prizes and fail in its mission.

The bomber had pulled the pin of the deadly explosive. That gave it ten seconds. He deliberately retained his hold on the pineapple as he counted under his breath.

"One—two—three—four—five—"

Then his hand whipped forward. But the black bomb was not projected over the heads of the unsuspecting crowd as the Wheel of Luck stopped at last. Stopped on number thirteen. Even those closest to the man with the death bomb were not sure what happened.

FROM beside the bomb thrower whipped a gray-clad arm with a gray glove enclosing a hand. The hand moved with the speed of a striking snake. Gloved fingers gripped the timed bomb as it left the hand of the thrower.

A companion hand in a gray glove was a knuckled fist. It, too, shot upward. The impact under the butt of the bomb thrower's ear lifted his light body from the ground. Only the press of the crowd prevented him falling.

The bomber did not pass out. His left hand went into his coat pocket. Fingers of the resistless quality of steel claws twisted that wrist and a bone snapped. But the other gray-gloved hand had whipped out over the heads of the crowd.

The death bomb whistled through the air. It was incredible that the gray hands, which hardly seemed attached to any one, could have been so fast and accurate. Perhaps every detail of this had been rehearsed. The bomb thrower had counted to five.

Two more seconds—three—four—five—

The pineapple had described an arc that carried it nearly a hundred feet. It was just touching the surface of the wide pool of the Death Chute, as it was called in Crazyland, when the blast of high explosive let go.

A long boat well filled with shrieking thrill-seekers was shooting down the nearly vertical incline into the pool. Here the boat would flip into the air, give a few slowing leaps, then hold its occupants in perfect safety.

The death bomb exploded and its most terrific force was driven downward. Tons of water met the boat speeding down the chute in one great wave. Screaming men and women plunged from the craft as it left the greased track and overturned.

On one side the concrete wall of the chute pool cracked open. Some water rained down upon the surrounding crowd. The pool started emptying its water through the break. Apparently those who had been in the capsized boat had escaped death or injury. They were floundering about.

Women screamed and some fainted. Hundreds pushed back and other hundreds met them in a wave. Some were seeking to escape a disaster they did not understand. Others were rushing to see whatever excitement might be provided.

For this was Crazyland! Anything might be expected to give its thousands of patrons added thrills. That was why Crazyland had become a ten million-dollar enterprise, owned by the veteran circus showman, Colonel Amos Hammell.

In the jamming collision of bodies over by the Death Chute, the immediate action to rescue those thrown from the boat, the origin of the explosion was entirely overlooked. The human rat who had planned to bomb the Wheel of Luck found himself still dizzy on his feet.

The man's left hand dangled helplessly where he had reached for a rod in his coat pocket. The rod itself had passed into a gray-gloved hand, then into the loose pocket of a gray coat.

The bombing rat attempted to turn, to see the owner of the lightning hands that had so effectively changed his murderous plan.

It seemed that none of those close to him could have acted so swiftly and ruthlessly. The bomber saw no person wearing gray clothes, gray gloves. And, after the first screaming fear swept the surging crowd, there came the listening hush that always follows such tense terror.

From nowhere, seemingly floating from some invisible speaker, came a voice. In all the hurly-burly of Crazyland, with its hundreds of raucous barkers, its blaring music, its murmuring crowd, it would have seemed that a loud, commanding voice would have been required to bring attention.

But this voice was a whisper. And it was heard. Weird it was, as penetrating as the reputed wail of a banshee. Eerily reaching every ear within a wide radius, chilling the spines of the hearers.

"Stay where you are!" it directed. "The danger is over! None will be hurt!"

Those whose clothes touched the gray-clad man moving swiftly among them could not have identified him as the speaker. For he was but one of the hundreds milling this way and that. The sober grayness of his attire, his oddly pointed chin, blur of grayish hair and round-brimmed hat made him an inconspicuous figure.

Seeing no copper, as he had feared there might be, the would-be bomber had thrust his injured hand into his pocket. Cursing under his breath, he had been making no attempt to hurry through the crowd. None could pick him out as being different from those around him. He was playing smart, very smart.

That is, until that sibilant, penetrating whisper came to his ears. His calm demeanor, the surest means to escape, vanished instantly. He croaked hoarsely, "The Whisperer!"

Others heard it and the two words were passed through the crowd:

"The Whisperer!"

MEN and women scrutinized the faces of their neighbors. "The Whisperer" was among them. The Whisperer had struck! None there but had read lurid accounts of the exploits of this supercrook.

The would-be bomber broke. He started wedging his way through the press of bodies, heedlessly, roughly. His movement was fast, like that of an eel. He snaked from the crowd that had been jammed in front of the now ignored Wheel of Luck.

The inconspicuous figure in gray had unaccountably dropped back after his swift intervention and attack. Merged deliberately with the crowd, but watching the man he had robbed of the death bomb. The man he had stunned with a single blow and relieved of his rod.

The man in gray saw the would-be bomber break as if all the city's police reserve were on his tail. A few regular policemen were helping hold the crowd in check to prevent a panic in the vicinity of the Death Chute pool. None had seen the flying bomb, the origin of the explosion.

Perhaps some thought the pool itself had been the cause of the strange blast.

The man in gray saw some order being restored. But he was weaving through the crowd. The would-be bomber was never more than a few yards ahead. The man's head jerked around, this way and that; no doubt seeking to ascertain if the police had spotted him, or if he was being shadowed.

He did not see the gray Whisperer.

For the man in gray was indeed the notorious, the much-feared Whisperer. The elusive crook who shared his secrets with none in the underworld. Whose chilling whisper had been heard by many, but who had never been identified in person by either the police or the crooks he himself took delight in preying upon.

The Whisperer's shaded eyes never left the fleeing bomber, but his gaze missed nothing that he passed. The explosion had temporarily silenced the sideshow barkers. Five diminutive men and women, Crazyland's prized family of midgets, were running back and forth on a sideshow platform.

The Whisperer could hear the barker on this show and the five midgets crying out, "Where is Lallie? Has anybody seen Lallie?"

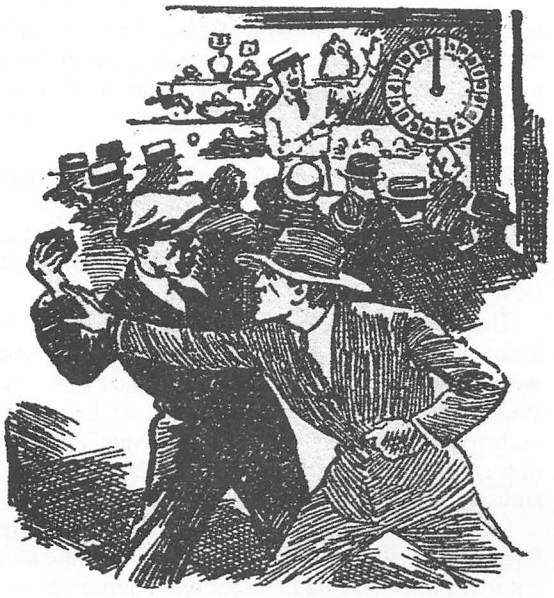
It seemed that one of the midgets, named Lallie, was missing. The tiny people were more concerned with this than with the blowing up of the Death Chute pool. A giant of a man with tightly curled light hair and an expansive, roundish face, loomed a head above all the crowd.

This man was pushing toward the sideshow of the midgets, coming from the pool where the blast had taken place. His voice boomed out over all the others.

"Ain't we got enough trouble?" he bellowed. "Can that outside chatter an' get back in the show! Wanna drive this crowd wilder than it is? Quit yellin' about Lallie! Maybe she's out gettin' a drink of pop or somethin'!"

The light haired man's big arms spread and swept the five midgets before him back into the sideshow entrance. The Whisperer chuckled eerily in his throat. The big man was "Fiver" Fabian, manager of Crazyland for Colonel Amos Hammell.

The name "Fiver" had been shortened from "Five-in-One." The Whisperer made it his business to know details like that. Fiver Fabian himself was a veteran showman. Years before, he had operated a "Five-in-One" show with carnivals. The name meant simply five attractions in one sideshow.



It had been said that Fiver Fabian had, at times, filled in for all his five attractions. He had been in turn a wrestler, a strong man, the wild man, the electric marvel and the ventriloquist. From a circus with Colonel Hammell, Fiver Fabian had graduated to the management of the ten-million-dollar Crazyland park at Midway Island.

AT this time, The Whisperer had no time to concern himself with a missing midget. It was unimportant, or so he believed. His immediate job was trailing the would-be bomber.

The Whisperer might have held the man, but he had intentionally let him go. For in this human rat who had attempted to spread death and destruction might be the key to those behind a new kind of racket.

The Whisperer intended to shadow the would-be bomber, in the hope of reaching those behind that attempted bombing. It had been sheerest luck that he had spotted this mobster and trailed him in the crowd to that Wheel of Luck. The Whisperer had, indeed, made it a Wheel of Luck for those ticket holders who would have died a horrible death.

The bombing of the Death Chute pool had temporarily suspended the patronage of the nearby amusements. The crowd now was being restrained by an augmented line of police, as it sought to see the real thing in thrills.

If the fleeing mobster saw the gray man keeping among other persons only a few yards behind him, he did not identify him as The Whisperer. But his darting, furtive eyes indicated he believed he was being trailed. The mobster passed a bent, gray-bearded man standing beside a whistling popcorn and peanut roaster mounted on a cart with handles.

The popcorn vendor's deep-socketed eyes went over the mobster's moving figure. The vendor's eyes were old, but there was a steely glint in them that did not belong to age. The gray Whisperer came abreast of the bearded old man. He did not seem to pause or speak.

But whispered words slid from a corner of The Whisperer's mouth.

"Cover me, Quick Trigger! That mug in the brown suit! He's buying a ticket for the Haunted Cave! Get on the back of that building!"

The popcorn vendor did not raise his head or make any other sign. He closed the roaster door and got between the handles of the pushcart. As he started trundling the popcorn cart off the main midway, the bomber was climbing into a round iron car on a track at the terrifying entrance to the amusement thriller known as the Haunted Cave.

Leering, ghostly faces in plaster ornamented the front of this odd structure. Patrons paid a dime and got into little iron cars that sent them bumping into darkened passages where skeletons and phosphorescent apparitions were supposed to chill them to the marrow.

Evidently the would-be bomber believed this would be a safe refuge from a possible shadow. Other iron cars were coming out, bumping and grinding. The mobster was alone in his car as it disappeared into the first cavernous passageway.

As the iron car vanished, The Whisperer was buying a ticket for the next car. As he turned, a car carrying four persons emerged. In it a woman was white-faced, and her lips were bleeding. Another woman lay limply in the arms of a male companion. She had fainted.

CHAPTER II
THE HANGING DOLL

THE WHISPERER hesitated one listening half minute. One of the operators helped lift the unconscious woman from the iron car. The operator of the car was grinning broadly.

"Some of 'em can't take it," he said cheerfully. "Sorry, mister, if the ghosts and the bones was too tough for the lady."

"Ghosts and bones?" said one of the men angrily. "Well, yes, I suppose a Haunted Cave isn't any place to take a woman! It was that hanging doll thing that got 'em! Damned if she didn't look human!"

"Hangin' doll?" said the operator. "What're you talkin' about?"

Another iron car came bumping out. The woman in this car had not fainted. She was screeching, as if she could not stop her hysteria.

"It's inhuman!" the woman screamed. "I tell you it was a body hanging there! I touched it and—"

The Whisperer whipped into the iron car. He gestured to the operator, and the car jolted into the darkness. The woman outside was still screaming.

"They want thrills and when they get them, they go to pieces," The Whisperer murmured. "Hellamighty! I never understand why fool women go in for this sort of thing!"

His iron car jerked him about and he hung onto the hand grips in the darkness. The car dropped down a steep grade in Stygian gloom. Fingers like ghostly hands brushed lightly across The Whisperer's face. The hanging fingers of leather were a part of the Haunted Cave setup. The Whisperer had been through here many times before.

Now the iron car would round a sharp turn, almost dislodge its occupant. A ghostly, blue light would come on, and the bones of an artificial skeleton would crackle as it swept over the car.

The Whisperer ducked his head and the bogus

bones swept by. Again, the iron car bumped and a chilling wind shrieked by. Weird lights began to dance from odd places. In one spot the iron car ceased moving. Here there came the rustling of ghostly bodies, a phosphorescent light that seemed to show a long procession of shadowy figures.

Nothing as yet to arouse more than perhaps a shivering laugh from any woman of normal nerves. The Whisperer was crouched in the car, listening intently. He knew the inside of the Haunted Cave. The cars traveled in perhaps fifty yards, turned and came out on another track.

THE WHISPERER could hear the car ahead bumping and grinding. The would-be bomber was riding in that car. A swift estimate, and The Whisperer judged the exact place to leave his own car, cut across the darkness on foot and intercept the other car.

He had a sudden, grim idea. His original plan had been to trail the mobster to some hideout. But if he could seize him here in the Haunted Cave, there would be ways to make him talk. That might be just as well. And if any man in the would could make another man spill all he knew, The Whisperer could do it.

The mobster's car reached what must have been the turning point at the extreme rear of the Haunted Cave. Though it was termed a cave, the space was no more than a building of sheet-iron and plaster. The Whisperer recalled there were two iron doors at the rear. These were emergency exits in case of fire or other trouble.

The mobster's car could be heard making the grinding turn to start back. The Whisperer remembered that at this turning point was another dangling skeleton. It was one of the most chilling spots in the cave, for this loosely held skeleton always collapsed upon the occupants of a car, then was jerked upward by a mechanical contrivance.

But that hardly gave sufficient reason for the would-be bomber, as yellow as he might be, to let out a sudden, squawking yell. For in that cry, forced from the throat of the fleeing mobster, was real fear. It was terror in the voice of one who is seeing unexpected horror.

For all its bumpy progress, the iron cars moved no faster than a man might walk. The Whisperer sprang from the clumsy vehicle. The iron car was guided by metal fingers that contacted a low roof that supplied electrical current.

From the raucous scream issuing from the mobster, The Whisperer imagined for an instant he might have somehow formed a circuit of the power juice.

If so, he might be slowly burning, as he fully deserved to burn. Only it did not fit in with The Whisperer's plan to lose this one known representative of the racket he was investigating.

The Whisperer moved swiftly, gliding on gripping, rubber soles. One of the eerie, blue lights flashed and revealed his grayish body, though it showed only a blur of movement. At that, the mobster's cry of fear died out and as replaced by a shaking curse.

He had seen The Whisperer. The bomb in his coat pocket had not been his only weapon. For with his oath, a sudden sidewise movement of his body, possibly to shelter himself behind his own iron car, the mobster sent red slashes leaping from a gun.

The whanging and whining of the slugs in the Haunted Cave were more awe-inspiring than any poor imitation of a ghost or skeleton might have been. Because the weird, blue light still revealed him, The Whisperer was forced to flatten himself to the floor and roll toward a darker spot.

The mobster had all the advantage, still being in the darkness where his car had turned. Now the mobster's iron car was not moving. The Whisperer understood that. The man had probably pulled the trolley fingers from the electrical roof to keep himself sheltered.

Slowly, as soundless as a ghost itself, The Whisperer inched toward the shooting mobster. Perhaps the man believed he had hit his pursuer. The Whisperer heard another iron car coming in from the outside. A woman let out a screaming laugh. Possibly the car had encountered the first dangling skeleton.

It became The Whisperer's instant purpose to reach and overcome the mobster without more shooting. Flying lead in that confined space could easily enough claim an innocent victim. The incoming iron car was bumping closer.

The Whisperer was close to the mobster now. He could dimly see the outline of the car behind which he might be sheltered. Then a glowing, yellow light leaped from the roof. The mobster yelled again with that note of fear, and jumped into view. His rod was swinging and erupting fire.

FROM The Whisperer's hand came what might have been the hissing of compressed air being slowly released. There was no crack. The mobster sprang up into the yellow light and fell backward.

To save those in the oncoming car, The Whisperer had aimed accurately with one of his ultra-modern silenced pistols.

By that bullet, he wiped out possible information from the man who had attempted to bomb the Wheel of Luck. The Whisperer knew this. But his attention had turned from the mobster's body as if the man never had been there. The Whisperer was running

forward on his toes, springing toward that ghastly radiance of the yellow light.

A woman in the approaching iron car screamed shrilly. Then this woman and her friend heard a weird whisper filling the Haunted Cave.

"Stay where you are!" it commanded. "Pull off the trolley fingers of your car!"

Apparently a cursing man did not know how to

From The Whisperer's hand came what might have been the hissing of compressed air being slowly released.

comply with this order. The car kept coming on. Now The Whisperer was in the circle of yellow light. A thick rope had descended from above. This was the contrivance on which a loosely boned skeleton was supposed to sprawl with terrifying contact upon those who passed.

The skeleton was no longer there. What appeared to be a diminutive woman in a dainty silk dress with a flowing skirt was hanging with the thick rope looped around her slender neck. One tiny, white hand gripped the rope that was around the neck. The other was rigid at one side.

The woman in the iron car behind The Whisperer continued to scream for several seconds. Her body could be heard thudding to the floor of the car. The man with her had at last solved the mystery of the trolley fingers. The car stopped.

The trick rope, moving on its mechanical device, was lowering the tiny woman's figure as it would have let the skeleton down. This then was the "hanging doll" that had frightened other women into hysteria only a few minutes before.

The car operator outside had said there was no hanging doll in the Haunted Cave. From the strange, husky oaths that came from The Whisperer's tense lips, it was clear the car operator had not spoken the truth.

Even as The Whisperer was jerking a knife from his clothes and slicing through the thick rope, he was recalling the Crazyland midgets outside seeking a missing Lallie.

Now The Whisperer remembered that Lallie, the smallest of all the midgets, was no other than the doll-like wife of diminutive Major Peppin, the head of the small family of midgets.

So the lifelike doll that had been hanged in the Haunted Cave was not a doll. The woman who had fanted, those who had screamed, had indeed had reason, a cause more ghastly than had ever been artificially produced in the Haunted Cave.

The Whisperer had cut the rope, and the midget woman's body lay lightly cradled on one arm. He could hear the man beside the fainting woman attempting to bring her to consciousness. Then a policeman's whistle cut shrilly into the Haunted Cave.

Feet resounded along the dark passage back toward the entrance, and beams of pocket torches suddenly penciled into the Stygian gloom.

The man beside the unconscious woman cried out.

"Over here! There was a whisper! Somebody was shooting! There in that light—a doll on a rope and—this way! Hi! It's gone!"

The yellow light was gone. It went out with a crackling of broken glass and the popping of a light bulb. The Whisperer smashed out the light with the pistol in his free hand. Rushing feet, shouts indicated half a dozen or more coppers were pouring into the Haunted Cave.

The Whisperer's oddly jutting jaw set grimly. He had no desire whatever to be discovered by the police beside the body of a dead mobster. More especially since he was holding the tiny body of the hanged midget woman in one crooked arm.

AS the light crashed out, The Whisperer moved swiftly with his odd and ghastly burden. He could feel the rough, cut hemp of the rope rubbing one cheek, and he swore to himself in awesome whispers.

The coppers were stumbling, fumbling about in the passage behind him. The man and the frightened woman held them up a few seconds. In that brief interval, The Whisperer heard a harsh, grating voice.

"The Whisperer is it again? Damn him! He tried to bomb the chute an' kill a bunch of people in one of the boats! You heard him in here, mister?"

"I heard a funny whisper," said the man. "He told us not to come any farther. So we—"

At this moment The Whisperer was slipping through one of the emergency exits at the back of the building of the Haunted Cave. He closed the iron door upon the harsh, profane voice that had been asking questions.

The Whisperer knew that to be the voice of Deputy Police Commissioner Henry Bolton. Bolton was a long-nosed, hard-faced officer. For months, his one bitter ambition had been to catch The Whisperer. That openly laudable ambition had as yet never been fulfilled.

While Deputy Bolton led his coppers, coming upon the body of the dead mobster, discovering the cut rope on which a loose skeleton had been hanged, and from which The Whisperer had deftly removed the body of the midget woman, The Whisperer himself was gliding away from the rear of the Haunted Cave building.

The whistle of the popcorn roaster wagon was still squealing merrily. It stood at the corner of the building. Its gray-bearded operator had been watching the two exits through the sheet-iron wall. One of the old vendor's hands was thrust into a ragged coat. His gnarled fingers were gripped upon the butt of an old-fashioned police revolver.

The Whisperer came upon him.

"Quick!" commanded the weird whisper. "Open the bottom of the cart! We can use that space underneath!"

The glinting eyes of the popcorn vendor fell upon the burden in The Whisperer's arms.

"Great glory, Wildcat!" he groaned. "What is it? A livin' doll? No, by all the powers, it's one of them midget women, an' she's been choked to death!"

The Whisperer was hurriedly thrusting the body of Lallie, the midget woman, into the little space inside the popcorn cart. The popcorn vendor had not addressed him as Whisperer. He had called him "Wildcat."

The Whisperer gave this name no attention. He said, "Quick Trigger, push the cart along. Go outside to my coupe. Take the little woman to the Fearon Street place. I'll join you there in a short time."

"But, Wildcat, you ain't meanin' you're stealin' this body?" protested the old popcorn vendor. "Glory be! After that blast an' all, Henry Bolton an' the cops will be hellin' all through the place! We ought to leave her here for them to find!"

The Whisperer moved one hand quickly. Oddly shaped dental plates were removed. The whole contour of his face changed. The long chin suddenly was square and his upper lip shortened. His voice when he spoke had the edge of steel rubbed on steel.

"You're taking the midget woman to the hideout and leaving her with Brian Boru to watch over her, Quick Trigger," he said. "I was compelled to rub out that bomb-throwing rat in there. We'll not get at the bottom of this Crazyland racket by skimming off the top.

"I've a straight hunch this hanged midget and that little job with the pineapple are all linked up with why the kids are paying ten cents instead of a nickel a ride on the merry-go-round. Take her to Fearon Street, Quick Trigger. Perhaps I'll beat you there."

DEPUTY HENRY BOLTON

The old popcorn man said, "I'll take her there, Wildcat. But I wish I'd never made that crazy dental plate. I've a feelin' in my bones this is only the beginnin' of murders."

"Exactly!" snapped the other. "Colonel Hammell's Crazyland is a ten-million-dollar business! We can't find out from which direction a racket is coming by pounding around with clubs, as Henry Bolton seems to be doing!"

AS the popcorn cart moved away, there was a grim smile across the broad mouth of The Whisperer, who had been called "Wildcat."

For The Whisperer was himself James "Wildcat" Gordon, police commissioner of the big town. The old man trundling the body of the midget woman away in the bottom of his cart was Dick Traeger, retired deputy commissioner of police. Because of his one-time expertness and readiness to shoot it out at any time or place, he had become known as "Quick Trigger."

The swift, gruesome events of the midnight hour in Crazyland, the amusement park of Midway Island, the city's leading summer resort, might or might not form unusual chapters in the lives of Wildcat Gordon and old Quick Trigger.

Police Commissioner Wildcat Gordon had been appointed against the will of the reform mayor, Van Royston. The mayor meant well enough and was sincere in his hatred of the underworld.

In the beginning he had wanted the city cleaned up, but found himself equipped with a police commissioner who believed in an eye for an eye, and a life for a life when it came to dealing with criminals and mobsters.

A former Army officer, Wildcat Gordon had brought iron discipline into the department. Mayor Van Royston wanted more soft-handed methods. For many years, Wildcat Gordon had resided with old Quick Trigger. The retired deputy had been almost a father to him.

Having retired, Quick Trigger went in for a hobby of his own. He became an expert on disguises. It was he who had shaped the odd dental plates that gave Wildcat Gordon a wholly different face. Many times, when the. headstrong hard-hitting police commissioner was threatened by danger or exposure, old Quick Trigger regretted the making of those dental plates.

As commissioner, Wildcat Gordon ran his police department with an iron hand. But this was not enough to combat crooked politics, the legal trickery of the underworld, the many outwardly respectable citizens who aided crooks and shared in their profits.

So, as The Whisperer, Wildcat Gordon found it most convenient to strike at the heart of the under-

world. As tonight in Crazyland, he became a mysterious figure, oftentimes ruthless, believed to be a supercrook. As The Whisperer, he struck hard and fast.

Tonight in the Crazyland amusement park of Colonel Amos Hammell, it seemed he had struck neither too hard nor fast enough. Intuition and swift action had probably saved a score of lives from a deadly bomb. But the advent of The Whisperer had not been in time to prevent the gruesome hanging of a midget woman where a skeleton should have been in the Haunted Cave.

CHAPTER III
A NEW BOMBER STRIKES

AS Quick Trigger trundled the midget woman away in his cart, Wildcat Gordon replaced the odd dental plates in his jaws. Once more he was the inconspicuous man in gray, an average, humble citizen who had nothing about him to attract attention or to hint of the violence that lay within that dynamic body and brain.

Deputy Henry Bolton, the harsh-voiced, long-nosed aide in Wildcat Gordon's office, was holding a commanding position in front of the Haunted Cave. Deputy Bolton talked loud and waved his hands. He liked to attract attention.

It had been said his chief ambition was to catch The Whisperer. He had another ambition: That was to become commissioner of police. In this he had the moral support of Mayor Van Royston, with which the party committee supporting Van Royston did not agree.

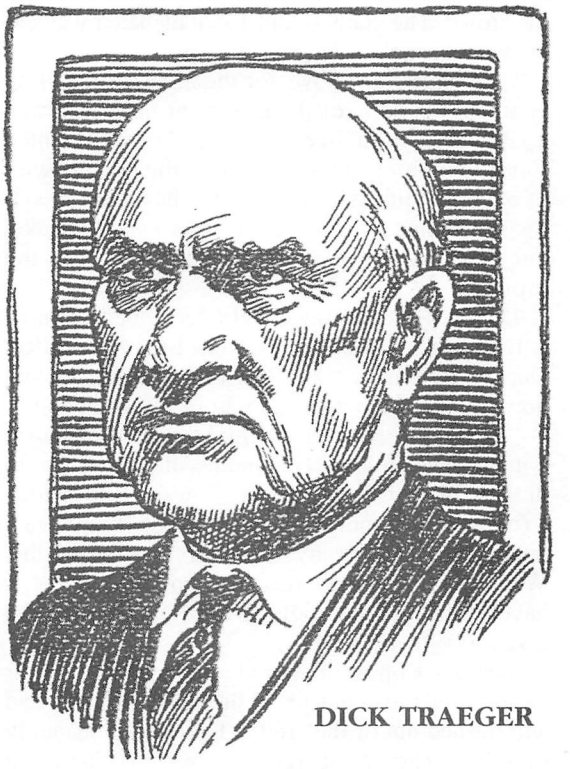
The Whisperer edged into the crowd around Henry Bolton. The Whisperer was munching popcorn from a paper bag. He had become only one of the several hundred persons the police were trying to prevent from rushing into the Haunted Cave. Deputy Bolton was listening to half a dozen voices pouring out their stories.

"We heard The Whisperer!" "I tell you, officer, there was a doll hanging in the Haunted Cave!" "Yes, sir, I remember now, it looked like one of them women midgets!" "I heard the whisper and saw a tall man in a blue suit throw that pineapple—"

Deputy Bolton was forced to wave his informants away.

"We had nothing that resembled a doll in our Haunted Cave," insisted the harassed and white-faced manager of this amusement. "I know the rope was cut and somebody killed that fellow in there. Sure, I heard shooting."

Deputy Bolton was rapidly getting nowhere. The Whisperer was making a keen study of the situation. There had been no doubt but that the slimy hand of the shakedown racket had reached out to



DICK TRAEGER

take its toll from Crazyland. Word of this had come to the office of the police commissioner when prices on the merry-go-round and other rides enjoyed by the kiddies had suddenly been doubled.

That "taking it out of the pockets of kids" had made Wildcat Gordon madder than anything in a long time. A brief investigation had revealed that some mysterious racket mob had been working a fast one on Crazyland.

Employing his own methods, the commissioner had learned that an attempt had been made to extort protection money from Colonel Hammell, the amusement park owner.

The white-haired, venerable Colonel Hammell was not a man to talk, or to give his confidence to any one, including the police. But it was clear Colonel Hammell had defied the racketeers. The police commissioner had learned that individual concessionaries and proprietors of amusements had come under the eye of the racketeers.

Perhaps all had been told to "pay up or else."

Some had paid, and their prices to the public had been raised to cover. It was clear that others had been as stubborn as Colonel Hammell and refused to pay tribute to the racket mob. The man running the Wheel of Luck was one of these. The Whisperer now suspected that the Haunted Cave was another.

STANDING there, listening to Deputy Bolton's misdirected questions, The Whisperer saw the tall, light-haired Fiver Fabian loom above the heads of

the crowd. The giant, round-faced manager wedged his way through to Deputy Bolton.

"I'm closin' all shows for the night, officer!" he boomed. "In spite of the statement that there was no doll or anythin' like that hangin' in the Haunted Cave, I am forced to report that Lallie Peppin, wife of our boss midget, Major Peppin, has been missin' for some time. I'm hopin' there is some mistake, but the midget has not been found on the grounds."

Deputy Bolton immediately demanded to know why this had not been reported earlier to the police. Deputy Bolton was tall, but Fiver Fabian looked down at him from a spare eight inches of height.

"Sorry, officer, but I'm afraid this whole thing is a matter that Colonel Hammell will want taken up directly with Commissioner Gordon," he stated. "You have one murder on your hands. You have a hundred persons ready to swear they heard this Whisperer everybody seems to go ga-ga about. I have some other ideas of my own, but they will be given to your chief."

Deputy Bolton muttered profanely as Fiver Fabian evidently considered the interview at an end and pushed out of the crowd. Fabian was instantly besieged, The Whisperer saw, by five clamoring midgets. The little people thronged around him, shrill voices wailing.

One midget was quieter than the others. He was a tiny man, with a full dress suit and a ribbon across his breast. He swung a cane and sported a high, silk hat. But The Whisperer could see this little fellow's grief was deeper than that of the other midgets.

He was Major Peppin, the leader of the troupe, and the husband of the missing Lallie Peppin.

The shows were rapidly being closed and the crowds herded from the big gates of Crazyland when The Whisperer glided out with others. So Fiver Fabian expected to make a direct report to him? Well, that report would have to wait upon another matter, if Fabian intended to make that report tonight.

TEN minutes later, a coupe shot through one of the big city's narrowest and meanest tenement streets. A street where passersby glanced furtively ateach other as they met, but where few words were spoken. The Whisperer had reached unsavory Fearon Street.

This thoroughfare in the slums reeked with evil. Shuttered windows in the fronts of narrow, brick buildings were ominous. Men passed with hands clutching their coat lapels together. The only women in the street shuffled miserably along.

The Whisperer parked his coupe. Glancing up at the window in a third-floor front where the shutter was open, he could see the glinting of eyes where the street lamp's radiance struck.

"Funny," murmured The Whisperer. "Now what has happened to Quick Trigger? He should have been here half an hour ago."

As if he had heard the words, Quick Trigger shuffled from a basement areaway. His gray beard and wig had been removed. Except for grayish tufts over his ears, Quick Trigger was bald. His face had a firm slant to a prominent chin. The Whisperer saw the eyes in their bony sockets were dancing with some new excitement.

"Glory be, Wildcat!" put forth the old man, catching The Whisperer's arm. "I've been waitin' down here with the midget woman! I think we've got somethin'! Come quickly!"

Quick Trigger had kept the body of Lallie, the midget, concealed in the areaway. The older man was talking fast, breathing with excitement.

"I saw that rat you shot in the Haunted Cave, Wildcat," said the old man. "Maybe I'm wrong, but he looks like one of the boys that kicks around with the Snow Grimes outfit. You remember Snow Grimes, Wildcat?"

The Whisperer nodded. He was gathering the tiny, dainty figure of the midget woman into his arms, starting for the front steps of the house. He remembered "Snow" Grimes. The nickname was significant. Snow Grimes had beat the rap on Federal charges several times for the smuggling of narcotics.

"Never heard of him or his crowd getting into an extortion racket," said The Whisperer. "Nothing on the records for him lately. I recall he has seemed to be in the dough, but I imagined that has come from dope smuggling that they couldn't pin on him."

Quick Trigger had opened the front door of the old tenement. The inner hallway was lighted by the dimmest of bulbs, scarcely showing the narrow steps leading upward.

QUICK TRIGGER spoke in a low tone. The ex-deputy was in his sixties, but his memory was keen. His brain itself was a gallery of criminal faces, with records of offenders' pasts.

"Snow Grimes was once in a circus show, Wildcat," he stated. "He knows some of the performers with Colonel Hammell's Crazyland. I saw him yesterday. He talked to two people. One was that pretty dancin' girl called Delma. The other was the slack wire walker, Jalo Latina. Seemed to know them pretty well."

Old Quick Trigger never stated positively what he believed The Whisperer or Wildcat Gordon, the police commissioner, should do. He only suggested now. The connection he intimated was obvious.

Crazyland was being put under the slimy hand of a racket. Perhaps racketeers were getting inside information from friendly performers.

The man who had attempted to bomb the Wheel of Luck was one of Snow Grimes' outfit. Snow Grimes had been in contact with performers of the Crazyland shows. The Whisperer made no comment.

On the third-floor landing a slatternly, frowzy-haired woman appeared, staring at The Whisperer and Quick Trigger.

"An' it's you, is it, Mr. Smith? An' your friend? That black devil of yours been raisin' sand all night. You been havin' trouble?"

In this hideout, as in several others, The Whisperer was known simply as D. Smith, a strange, elusive man who said little but heard much. Nevertheless, he was known as one resident of the underworld it was well to leave strictly alone.

The black devil spoken of by the slatternly woman was then pawing at the inside of the third-floor door. Quick Trigger opened it. A Scottish terrier, black as midnight with glowing coals for eyes, put his paws on one of The Whisperer's knees. His red tongue licked out and he sniffed suddenly at the tiny, silken-clad midget woman in The Whisperer's arms.

"It's all right, Brian Boru," said The Whisperer. "Something for you to watch a while, fellow. There may be others."

The light sprang on inside the room. It revealed the dainty, doll-like body of Lallie, the midget. The bleary eyes of the slatternly woman stared. But in this dubious locality, the business of each man was his own.

Only the woman gulped a little and said, "I didn't know you went in for doll babies, Mr. Smith! My! My! She's wearin' gorgeous rags, an' she looks almost human!"

The Whisperer no doubt knew his landlady's greedy regard for such clothing as the tiny midget who had been hanged was wearing. She would have cheerfully stolen pennies from a baby's bank.

"Brian Boru will watch the gorgeous rags, Mrs. Jother," stated The Whisperer. "Brian Boru, you understand?"

The Scottish terrier bared ugly, white fangs at the slatternly landlady. The door closed.

"The black devil," muttered the woman, going down the stairs. "He'd tear one limb from limb."

THE WHISPERER

Quick Trigger was caring for the body of Lallie, the midget. The black Brian Boru crouched at his feet. The Whisperer moved over to a telephone concealed in the wall. He removed his dental plates. The edged, crisp voice that called police headquarters was that of Commissioner Wildcat Gordon.

"Been out in the country," he stated. "Just learned there's been trouble in Crazyland at Midway Island? What is it?"

The rasping voice of Deputy Henry Bolton replied.

"Commissioner Gordon? Sure! There's been plenty of trouble! The mayor himself wants to talk to you! He's been ringing your place for the past hour!"

Wildcat Gordon lived with old Quick Trigger, and his pretty granddaughter, known as "Tiny" Traeger, in a penthouse. This residence was high above the city's waterfront. It had been erected on top of a deserted warehouse building which Quick Trigger had purchased with his savings.

"I'll talk to the mayor, Henry," stated Wildcat quietly.

MAYOR VAN ROYSTON was the pattern for a fashion-plate mayor. He was always dressed correctly. Evenings, it was a high, silk hat and open-faced clothes. His face was small, with a retreating chin. This chin bobbled in and out when he talked. Wildcat Gordon could almost see it bobbing now.

"Where are you, Gordon?" snapped Mayor Van Royston. "Where have you been? Murders and bombings by The Whisperer on our hands, and we can't find our commissioner! Deputy Bolton has a general alarm out! There was a panic in Crazyland! Scores of people hurt—"

Wildcat Gordon smiled a little. His honor was inclined to overstate most situations.

"Sorry," said Wildcat calmly.

"Sorry?" squealed Mayor Van Royston. "You're sorry, and me here with Jackson Meldrum, attorney for Colonel Hammell, and Mr. Fiver Fabian, manager of Crazyland, demanding that we do something! Why, at this very minute, Attorney Meldrum says Colonel Amos Hammell himself had been threatened with bodily harm!"

"Yes?" said Wildcat. "That might be in the cards, too."

But Mayor Van Royston let out a sudden louder squawk.

"Gordon! Gordon! We've just had a flash! Colonel Hammell's house above Crazyland has been bombed! Attorney Meldrum told me the colonel had been threatened by racketeers! Now they've got him, and you—"

CHAPTER IV
MAN WITHOUT FOOTPRINTS

"REMAIN here, Quick Trigger!" rapped out Wildcat. "Don't leave this room until you hear from me! This Crazyland racket goes deeper than it appeared! Colonel Hammell's house has been bombed!"

Wildcat slipped his odd dental plates into position. That way he left the tenement hideout. Behind him, old Quick Trigger was looking at the tiny figure of the midget woman, Lallie, and swearing under his breath. Brian Boru crouched near the bed on which the midget lay.

With his coupe moving swiftly out of Fearon Street, The Whisperer underwent a swift evolution in appearance. His gray clothes were changed by turning and zipper devices. Powder came from his blurred white hair. Articles were produced from concealed pockets of the car.

From one space, he took a fresh red carnation and a new necktie that matched it in color. These harmonized with rusty-red hair.

In less than fifteen minutes, the police coupe of Commissioner Wildcat Gordon screamed into the residence block back of Crazyland. Other squad cars were already on the job. Wildcat Gordon stepped from his coupe.

This was the ex-Army officer commissioner. A new Army hat was cocked over one of his almost colorless, Texas eyes. His square, clean, hard face showed above a vivid red necktie. His suit of violent blue had a red carnation in the coat lapel. He wore bright, yellow shoes.

In every detail, Wildcat Gordon was the exact opposite of the gray, drab, unnoticeable D. Smith, The Whisperer. Wildcat was a hard man with a hard jaw and a harder voice.

Deputy Henry Bolton and several of his men were keeping a growing crowd from the side yard of the tall, four-story residence occupied by Colonel Hammell. It could be seen that an explosion had torn a wide, gaping hole through a second-story wall, exposing a shattered bed and a room that had been thoroughly wrecked.

Anyone sleeping in that bed, or even in the room itself, could not have escaped death. Wildcat Gordon strode swiftly to the group surrounding Deputy Bolton. The bombing murder of the millionaire and veteran showman, Colonel Amos Hammell, would be a staggering blow for the efficiency of the police department.

This unexpected striking of another bomb thrower knocked all Wildcat's plans for unearthing the Crazyland racket to unnerving bits.

Then, as he strode across the sidewalk, fingers flicking petals from his red carnation, a stubby, bad-smelling pipe clenched in his teeth, Wildcat heard a voice. It was the booming tone of Fiver Fabian, whose curled light hair showed a foot above all those standing near him.

"By hell!" exploded Fabian. "It was close! An' if I hadn't called the colonel an' had him on the telephone, that blast would have got him!"

Fiver Fabian was boasting with ample reason.

Colonel Amos Hammell, a white-haired man with a ruddy, outdoor face in spite of his late seventies, had undoubtedly been saved by a chance telephone call.

PERHAPS half an hour before this time, the venerable showman had retired, but not to sleep. For ten years Crazyland had been more than his fortune; it had been his hobby, the culminating dream of a circus man's lifetime. Its people were his people, his only people.

No other amusement park on the continent could equal it in attractions. Colonel Hammell gave the public the kind of thrills they wanted, the extra kick that went with the big city's island beach resort.

But Colonel Hammell was more than a showman. His leading performers, his thrill artists, were like a personal family. The colonel had no living kin. So his show people, many of them, had come to Crazyland from his last circus.

Chiefly, Major Peppin's midgets had been with him for years. They were a big attraction, good sideshow box office. The aging colonel loved each one of the midgets as if they had been his own tiny children. The disappearance, the almost certain, weird murder of Lallie, the diminutive wife of Major Peppin, was a terrible blow.

Colonel Hammell thought of others on the show. There were the three Latina brothers. Rocco, the high diver. Jalo, the slack wire walker. "Lifto," the strong man and animal trainer. The colonel had given them these show names. He had picked up the brothers from the street and trained them in his own circus when they were boys.

There was Delma, the sensational dancing girl. Young, exquisitely beautiful, a marvelous sideshow attraction. He had taken her from an orphans' home where he had seen her dancing. Delma was the only name she had been given on the show. Oftentimes Colonel Hammell had considered adoption, giving the girl his own name.

He thought of these tonight as worry seethed in his tired brain. Lallie, the lovable, dainty midget, hanged in the Haunted Cave. He did not think what this would do to business. But Lallie must be found, dead or alive.

It was after midnight now. Colonel Hammell, immersed in his anxious thoughts, did not hear a faint scratching outside his bedroom windows. But there was a solid, jarring bump that seemed to jolt the window frame.

Colonel Hammell climbed from bed. His hand was on the blind. No further noise came. Perhaps he thought he had imagined. it. But he would make sure. He was letting up the window shade when the telephone downstairs rang sharply.

The colonel's sleepy valet called up to him. He said it was an urgent, personal call. Colonel Hammell left the bedroom and went to the telephone. Fiver Fabian was speaking from police headquarters.

Fabian said the police commissioner would want to know several things concerning tonight's tragic events. Was Colonel Hammell ready to turn over to the police the threatening demands he had received?

"No, no, Fiver," said Colonel Hammell wearily. "That would be for myself, and I am not afraid. Letters, crank letters, all of them. I've had many of them in the show business, Fiver. The police must get at these scoundrels who caused trouble on the shows tonight. They must stop the robbing of my people. The prices must be kept down, and these killers must be found. As for myself—"

SERGEANT TOM THORSEN

"But, Colonel Hammell, it all may be inked together," Fiver Fabian was arguing.

Fabian was talking from a telephone in Police Commissioner Gordon's own office where he had been discussing the situation with Mayor Van Royston and Attorney Jackson Meldrum, the colonel's own lawyer, who had been called from his home.

Colonel Hammell did not have a chance to reply to this. A terrific blast pounded one wall of the house. Upstairs a window crashed in and smoke fumes filtered from the colonel's bedroom. The colonel dropped the phone and went upstairs.

The bed on which he had been lying had been blown to the opposite wall. The blast had been inward. A bomb had been exploded outside, close to the window.

ALL this Wildcat Gordon learned in a minute or two. A high fence surrounded a wide yard between the colonel's residence and the next house. But little of the blast debris had fallen. There had been a heavy shower of rain only a few minutes before midnight. The yard behind the fence was of softest, black mud.

Wildcat snapped an order.

"Seargent Thorsen, keep everyone out, but go over that yard for prints! Henry, keep all this crowd back!" Detective Sergeant Thorsen had the kind of face that might have been carved from wood—old battleship wood. He was a former Army sergeant. As such, his commissioner's orders were his only religion. When Wildcat spoke, Sergeant Thorsen was one man who obeyed, come hell or high water. He shared with Wildcat the enmity of Deputy Henry Bolton.

Sergeant Thorsen picked three coppers. They started over the muddy yard, brilliant beams of flashlights playing ahead of them. A few bricks had dropped from the second-story wall. Suddenly Sergeant Thorsen was swearing. He was back beside Wildcat.

"There's nary a footprint in the yard, chief," he stated. "And the street and alley fences are too far away for any man to have thrown a bomb without getting into the yard. That pineapple busted straight into that window and it must have hit it as it exploded."

Fiver Fabian and Jackson Meldrum, the lawyer for Colonel Hammell, joined the group.

"What you say is impossible!" boomed Fabian, glaring down at Sergeant Thorsen. "There would have to be footprints in that mud. No man could walk on air across there. The bomb had to be thrown—"

"Hi, sergeant!" hailed one of the detectives. "Here's a funny one! I've got a print, but it's a damned sight more than a footprint! Looks like some mug took a header off that wire clothesline up there!"

Wildcat was next to see the deep indentation in the mud close to the fence. It looked as if some heavy body had fallen. Wildcat shot a light up to the clothesline. It was of heavy, sagging wire, but well fastened.

One end of the wire extended from a one-story shed across the vacant yard. The other end was bracketed into the wall of Colonel Hammell's residence. This end was within a few feet of the gaping hole torn out by the explosion.

Mayor Van Royston was there and gulped, "It looks as if a man crawled—or walked—across on that wire, then fell or jumped! Here's mud where he went over the top of the fence!"

Wildcat looked closely at the impression in the mud. It was as Mayor Van Royston had said. It appeared a man had fallen or jumped from the clothesline wire. And he had been smart, that fellow. For he must have rolled to the fence and climbed it, being careful not to leave the print of either a foot or a hand in the mud.

Outside the fence, the pavement had been tramped by scores of feet. Wildcat Gordon shot a glance up along the wall.

JACKSON MELDRUM, attorney, had long been Colonel Hammell's lawyer. He was the type of attorney who probably wrote out all his arguments so there would be no dispute about them later. He cleared his throat.

Meldrum had a mellow, modest voice, and hesitated over each word that came.

"Mr. Fabian," he said slowly, "the bomb thrower walked that wire up there. How many men could walk that wire, Mr. Fabian?"

The giant, round-faced Fabian stared at Meldrum for half a minute.

"Well," he hesitated, "there could be a good many I don't know about. Or anyone might have crossed it with their hands—"

Attorney Meldrum said, "Mr. Fabian, out with it. The truth is you know only one man who could have walked that wire. Weren't you telling me something the other day about the Latina brothers demanding new contracts and getting nasty about it?"

Fiver Fabian usually was smiling, jolly. His round face became set and he glared angrily at Attorney Meidrum.

"What you suggest is damnable!" he exploded. "What if the Latina boys did ask for more money? Hell, they're among the colonel's best bets!"

"Yes," stated Attorney Meldrum. "And they know it. Jalo Latina could walk that wire or any other wire. So they had been getting nasty about more money, Mr. Fabian? Couldn't someone in the show have an object in killing Colonel Hammell?"

Fiver Fabian let out a profane yell.

"You're one of the reasons I detest all lawyers!" he shouted. "The Latinas, Jalo may have wanted more money! But they have nothin' to gain if Colonel Hammell dies!"

"You show people stick together," observed Attorney Meldrum. "I was thinking that insiders of the Crazyland show would be a mighty big help to some outside racket! And I wouldn't be too sure the Latinas haven't something to gain by the colonel's death! I—"

Attorney Meldrum snapped his mouth shut. Wildcat noted it was as if he had almost disclosed some confidence. The circle around the impression in the mud had increased. Lights played.

Wildcat was easing himself from among the others. His keen, colorless eyes fell upon a pair of hands upon which one flashlight had struck.

By this time there were two score outsiders besides the police in the little crowd. What Wildcat saw was trivial, almost ridiculous to be noticed at such a moment. The pair of hands were nervously in motion. One held a small nail file.

The point of the file was being carefully scraped under the tips of the nails on the other hand.

Wildcat then saw the nail file slipped back into a vest pocket. It seemed incredible that a man cleaning his fingernails might have any connection with the attempted bomb assassination of Colonel Hammell. But Wildcat must have had some reason for linking the incident with the tragedy.

The jaunty commissioner moved into the circle. He was saying, "There's nothing more we can do here, boys. Sergeant Thorsen, you will take a detail and make an immediate checkup on Jalo Latina, especially on the clothes he might have been wearing."

As he was speaking, Wildcat's lightning fingers had dipped into a vest pocket. Seconds later a nail file was carefully wrapped in tissue paper in his own pocket.

Sergeant Thorsen's car pulled away with the squad. Wildcat Gordon was missing when Mayor Van Royston next looked around. Attorney Meldrum suggested they should have a talk with Colonel Hammell himself, if the colonel had recovered from the shock.

AT this moment, Wildcat Gordon was swiftly ascending a fire escape in the darkness at the back of the colonel's tall residence. He cat-footed across the nearly flat roof. A chimney stuck up near the roof coping.

Wildcat leaned out, peering down. He was directly above the window where the explosion had taken place. A thin, but strong manila rope was still fastened around the chimney. It had the strength to support the weight of a man.

When Wildcat pulled it up, he noted the lower end had been frayed. The strands puffed out as if they had been in the direct blast of the bomb.

Wildcat flicked a rusty lock of hair out of his colorless eyes. He stared across at the one-story shed at the opposite side of the muddy yard.

"Yes," he said softly, "a wire walker could have come across on that wire clothesline, or he could have slid down this rope. It's too thin to give holds to climb back and he could have then walked out on the wire. I haven't the slightest doubt but that Sergeant Thorsen will find a mud-stained suit of clothes in this Jalo Latina's room."

Wildcat removed the rope and concealed it before he descended and entered the home of Colonel Hammell.

Colonel Hammell's ruddy, old face was flushed with anger as Wildcat Gordon entered. He was shouting at Meldrum, Mayor Van Royston, Fiver Fabian and Deputy Henry Bolton.

"It's too damned preposterous, Meldrum!" roared the colonel. "You should have better judgment than to voice suspicion of one of my boys! Jalo Latina would no more do me harm than would—well, one of my midgets!"

The colonel's voice saddened suddenly at the mention of the midgets. The closer violence had for a few minutes erased the thought of the hanged Lallie Peppin from his mind.

Fiver Fabian nodded his leonine head. Fabian looked oddly too big to be in the ordinary room of a house.

"I agree with the colonel," he stated. "It will be found that Jalo Latina could not possibly have done it. He had no motive. We've a clean show, an' our long-time performers are all one family."

Attorney Meldrum might have been mellow, but tonight there was somewhat of a streak of animus in his tone.

"As Colonel Hammell's lawyer," he stated, "I advise it is only fair that the police should be given all the facts. Isn't it true, Mr. Fabian, that the Latina brothers and one or two others dislike the midget troupe very much? Among those, I would say, is that dancing girl known as Delma. Isn't there some sort of an affair between her and this Jalo Latina?"

Colonel Hammell got heavily to his feet. Fiver Fabian leaped up. Attorney Meldrum looked at them, still mildly complacent.

"If you didn't know my affairs so well, Meldrum, I'd boot you out of my house!" shouted the colonel.

Fabian shook a huge fist under Meldrum's blunt nose.

"What if there is rivalry between performers in a show?" he boomed out. "Sometimes the midgets do get in other people's hair with their smart ways. But what's a bit of jealousy, even between the Latinas an' the midgets? Delma, the dancin' girl, is straight as they make 'em. She's properly engaged to marry Jalo Latina. So what?"

Wildcat Gordon listened, his broad mouth clamped shut. Quick Trigger had seen Snow Grimes talking with this dancing girl!

CHAPTER V
FATAL HANDWRITING

COLONEL HAMMELL'S telephone rang. The man said it was for the police commissioner. Wildcat Gordon walked over. He spoke in curt, low tones.

"Yes, Sergeant Thorsen? I thought it would be that way. He says he has not been out of his hotel, room? Right, sergeant! Take him into custody on the charge of attempted murder!"

Wildcat walked back into the room. His Texas eyes held little expression. Colonel Hammell looked at him, the ruddiness fading from his wrinkled face.

"What is it, commissioner?"

"I have just ordered the arrest of Jalo Latina," said Wildcat. "My men found a suit of clothes crusted with mud—black mud—in his closet. The wire walker said he had not been out of his hotel room. The hotel clerk said differently."

Colonel Hammell's big body slumped heavily into his chair. Beads of sweat came on his forehead.

"It couldn't be true," he groaned. "Meldrum, perhaps you think I should apologize, but I don't feel like it. However, you can now tell Commissioner Gordon about the letters."

Attorney Meldrum produced five letters. Each demanded direct settlement in the sum of half a million dollars for protection from "accidents." The latest of these notes was brief and to the point:

> YOU KNOW BY NOW THE FIRST OF THE ACCIDENTS HAVE HAPPENED. IT IS IN YOUR POWER TO STOP THEM. YOU WILL RECEIVE A LATER MESSAGE.

Wildcat took this latter note. It was written in fine penmanship on creamy note paper. The first four extortion notes had been crudely printed with letters clipped from newspapers. This one was undoubtedly the writing of a woman.

"That one," said Meldrum's mellow voice, "arrived by messenger shortly before midnight tonight. Strangely enough, it was delivered several

minutes before that bomb exploded in the Death Chute pool, and prior to the discovery that the midget woman was missing."

"Great Scott!" let go Mayor Van Royston with one of his rare outbursts. "Then whoever wrote it knew what was going to happen!"

"Marvelous!" cut in Wildcat's hard voice. "But it seems to me a hot case is being built up here without reference to the one major item in tonight's happenings! Dozens of witnesses at Crazyland heard The Whisperer! Many when the bomb was thrown! At least one when that fellow was found dead in the Haunted Cave and the supposed hanging midget disappeared!"

Brief hope flashed across Colonel Hammell's ruddy face.

"That's so," he said quickly. Long-nosed Deputy Bolton cut in with his harsh voice.

"That only cinches suspicion on these others," he announced. "I happen to know this Whisperer always hides behind crooks. He plays along with the criminals against the police an' decent society."

"You may be right," stated Wildcat mildly. "But perhaps The Whisperer has something to do with these extortion notes. It would be easy enough to have some girlfriend write that last one."

IT was strange that Wildcat Gordon should deliberately be directing suspicion upon himself in his other identity. But Wildcat Gordon seldom made a move or utter a word without definite reason. Just now he guessed Deputy Henry Bolton was too sure of himself.

In other words, Deputy Bolton had been nosing around and had something up his sleeve. Wildcat had egged Henry into playing his card. The deputy did it with a gloating voice.

"Yeah, Commissioner Gordon?" said the deputy. "In that case, The Whisperer's girl friend could be none other than this dancer. I took a few minutes off to go into that, after Attorney Meldrum reported to me about the threatenin' notes."

Deputy Bolton triumphantly flourished a glossy picture print. On this appeared the delectable, curving figure of the girl called Delma. A Crazyland sideshow is not a place where a dancing girl conceals many of her charms. This lovely, starry-eyed creature could have concealed a great many more than she did and still have been alluring.

Deputy Bolton stuck one long finger on the carded picture.

"I had the laboratory check, Commissioner Gordon," he stated, glancing at Mayor Van Royston for approval. "The writin' in this last extortion note an' that on the picture is one and the same."

Under the picture was the signature:

With the compliments of DELMA.

It required no eagle eye to detect that the letter and the words on the picture, purveyed at a dime to sideshow patrons, were identical. Wildcat had both in his hands. He studied them for a few brief seconds.

He said, "You believe this dancing girl wrote that note, Colonel Hammell?"

The veteran showman closed his eyes wearily.

"If it is true," he said, "I'm afraid it doesn't matter much to me what happens to my shows."

Wildcat Gordon was calmly placing the note and the picture in a pocket.

"But Commissioner Gordon!" suddenly protested Attorney Meldrum. "That note—the writing, on behalf of Colonel Hammell, I don't want it to go out of my hands!"

WILDCAT'S Texas eyes surveyed the plump, mellow person of Attorney Meldrum. He tamped tobacco into his stubby, smelly pipe.

"The writing is already out of your hands, Meldrum," he stated cheerfully. "I presume, Henry, knowing your methods, you have lost no time in ordering the arrest of the dancing girl?"

The long-nosed deputy grinned maliciously. Mayor Van Royston nodded approval. Plainly the two of them believed they had put one over in the absence of the commissioner.

"This piece of goods they call Delma has been in headquarters' jail for some time," said Deputy Bolton.

"It was necessary that some one should act in the absence of our commissioner," purred Mayor Van Royston.

Wildcat's yellow-shod feet slapped across the hallway to Colonel Hammell's telephone. In ten seconds, his voice carried with cutting emphasis back into the room.

"That's my direct order! Release the girl booked under the name of Delma at once! No further detention or action with regard to the Crazyland trouble will be brought about except by my direct order!"

Wildcat strode back into the room. Colonel Hammell was staring at him. Mayor Van Royston pouted his chest.

"Commissioner Gordon, this is too much!" he shouted. "There never was a more obvious case of extortion or more direct evidence!"

"Right as hell!" snapped Wildcat. "Too obvious and too direct! I take it that this dancing girl is neither an imbecile nor addicted to writing in her sleep! Has it occurred to you that someone behind the hullabaloo of this racket wanted the girl suspected?"

Wildcat Gordon was looking directly at the convulsed face of Attorney Meldrum. Vast, if still

doubtful relief, appeared on the ruddy face of Colonel Hammell.

"That's smart!" boomed big Fiver Fabian. "It's damned funny, Meldrum, you couldn't have guessed that in the beginnin'!"

WITHIN half an hour after Wildcat had pocketed the picture of Delma, the dancing girl, and the extortion letter, he let himself into an elevator enclosed in a square concrete column. Several stories up, he stepped out into the hallway of a neatly furnished penthouse.

Wildcat had called old Quick Trigger. The former deputy had beaten him home. The tempting aroma of hot coffee came from a small kitchen. Wildcat turned aside into his own quarters.

This was a single big room, with a dressing room at one side.

"Wildcat, for Heaven's sake, I've been keeping this coffee hot for hours!" called a musical voice. "You and Quick Trigger, come and get it!"

Wildcat did not reply. He was looking at the picture of the luscious dancing girl, Delma. Letter by letter, he was comparing the girl's signature and the words in the extortion note.

"Perfect!" he said aloud. "Couldn't be sweeter than that!"

"Wildcat Gordon!" rasped the voice that had been so musical a minute before. "So she couldn't be sweeter, huh? One of those naked sideshow hussies, and me keeping coffee hot! So that's where you were while headquaters was calling you!"

Wildcat's hand was just in time. A slender set of white fingers snatched at the picture of Delma. Wildcat rescued it. He faced around with a grin.

Tiny Traeger's blue eyes were ablaze. Her delicate oval face was furiously red, and it looked redder framed as it was by clustering, black curls. She stamped one small foot.

"Give me that picture this instant!" she demanded. "I won't have a thing like that in my house!"

"It's evidence, sweetheart," said Wildcat, thrusting the picture into his pocket.

"Don't call me pet names!" flared the girl. "Evidence? Sure it is evidence! The same kind as the picture of the girl I found in your old Army kit! I—"

Wildcat's colorless eyes twinkled.

"So you've been prowling among my things?" he demanded. "Someday you'll get a spanking that'll keep you standing up for a week!"

Tiny Traeger whirled and flounced from the room. She was sobbing a little.

"I suppose maybe you'd like me if I was in some sideshow—like—like that creature!" she flung back.

Wildcat continued to grin. Old Quick Trigger walked in, shaking his head. Tiny's grandfather knew the girl was wildly in love with Wildcat Gordon. Wildcat regarded her as still a child.

Quick Trigger had given Wildcat every opportunity to learn the truth, but the smart commissioner's detective instinct failed him utterly in his own personal affairs.

Over their coffee, Wildcat and Quick Trigger talked in low tones. Tiny's blue eyes watched Wildcat suspiciously. She heard Wildcat's half whisper.

"Sure, Quick Trigger, the little woman will be all right in the Fearon Street place until we get a break."

Tiny went out of the room with a banging door. So Wildcat liked the kind of girls that danced in sideshows?

DURING the later hours of the night and most of the day, the police commanded by Deputy Henry Bolton combed Crazyland and its vicinity for the missing midget woman, Lallie. They met with no success.

The afternoon shows had opened. If the racketeers menacing the amusement park had hoped to drive away business and force threatened showmen to pay for protection, they were disappointed.

Headline news of the missing midget woman, the murder in the Haunted Cave, the bombing of the Death Chute had combined to bring unnumbered thousands of thrill-seekers into Crazyland.

A blazing summer sun added to the rush to the coolness of Midway Island. The Haunted Cave especially was getting a strong play. Its bumping iron cars were working to capacity.

The man dressed all in gray, munching popcorn from a bag, paused before the sideshow where Delma, the dancing girl, swayed to the tomtom pounding of the music.

The girl's piquant face wore a smile. But the man in gray could tell it was as artificial as her violently painted lips, the rouged cheeks.

No doubt she was thinking of Jalo Latina, now in a cell, on suspicion of attempted murder. Perhaps of her own arrest and what to her must have been a strange release. The Whisperer moved on.

Major Peppin was valiantly uttering merry quips. He flourished his small cane and smiled gaily, as if tragedy were not squeezing his loyal heart. The Whisperer had imagined it would be this way.

"The show must go on," he repeated the old quotation.

Yes, the show was going on. The slim Rocco Latina was climbing his sixty-foot ladder for his death-defying dive into a small tank of black oil, while his brother was in jail, labeled a murderer.

The Whisperer glided into the entrance of the sideshow where Delma had stood on the platform.

The midgets were in a separate show all their own. But in the bigger sideshow was the other brother of Jalo Latina.

Lifto was his show name. He had been swinging great weights, smiling at the jostling crowd. He could not avoid hearing muttered phrases.

"He's one of them! His brother is a killer!"

Still Lifto smiled. Yes, the show must go on. The midgets and the mighty strong man of Crazyland would do their parts equally. The Whisperer halted, watching the act of Lifto Latina.

CHAPTER VI
MURDER WITH MUSIC

LIFTO LATINA was a remarkably developed, powerfully muscled performer. The sideshow building was packed for the late afternoon performance. Interest was equally divided between Lifto Latina and Delma, the dancing girl with the young and supple body.

With the news of the missing midget; the bombing of Colonel Hammell's home, had also been the story of the dancing girl's arrest and sudden release. Word had gone out and some of the newspapers already were rapping Commissioner Wildcat Gordon for freeing the girl.

Wildcat suspected that Deputy Bolton had supplied information for some of this criticism. Nevertheless, Wildcat was the inconspicuous, gray Whisperer in the round-brimmed hat who was studying the heavily rouged face of the dancing girl. Delma was the leader, the most daring of the dancing group.

Wedged in the crowd, The Whisperer would have been the last man to be picked for what he was. Outside and in the sideshow, police in uniform and plainclothes were everywhere. Quick Trigger, again in the guise of the bearded popcorn vendor, slid in alongside The Whisperer.

Quick Trigger said from the corner of his mouth, "Reckon we ain't doin' so good, Wildcat. Unless I'm badly mistaken, Crazyland is right now peppered with rats that belong to the Snow Grimes mob. I'm thinkin' he's imported a few from the outside. They're travelin' singly an' in pairs. I'm afraid hell's due to pop any minute."

The Whisperer gave no sign that he heard. This afternoon the prices on the rides and other amusements, which had been raised, were cut back to the old figure. The Whisperer imagined that was by direct order of Fiver Fabian, coming from Colonel Hammell.

It meant the grieved and angry colonel intended to fight the mysterious racket to the limit. Having fixed suspicion upon Snow Grimes through the acute observation of old Quick Trigger, it might have seemed the thing to do to pick up the sleek mobleader. But The Whisperer had other plans. He was convinced he would get nowhere with Snow Grimes.

Behind all this was something deeper, more sinister than the mere shakedown racket of the mob. Before he had again assumed the role of The Whisperer, the commissioner had placed a nail file in the police laboratory to have its minute scrapings analyzed. With this was the suit of clothes stained with black mud found in Jalo Latina's hotel closet.

And at this moment, as the sideshow crowd partly applauded and partly hissed the dancing of Delma, the efforts of Lifto Latina to please, The Whisperer knew that his standby, Detective Sergeant Thorsen, was interviewing a photographic printer. The printer who had produced the pictures of the dancing girl.

Having warned The Whisperer that Crazyland was widely spotted by members of the Snow Grimes mob, old Quick Trigger eased away, returning to his popcorn and peanut roaster. At this moment, Lifto raised a heavy set of weights. He permitted them to thud to the platform to indicate they were genuine.

Beside him was a heavily barred cage. The hideously grinning face of an immense chimpanzee showed through the irons. A sign warned the crowd this was "Orong, the World's Only Orangutan in Captivity." The animal, though only a chimpanzee, seemed big enough for the part.

Two helpers made a great pretense of fear, prodding the chimp back with pointed forks as they opened the door of the cage. Lifto smiled at his audience and slipped inside the cage. Orong bared his fangs and rumbled his apparent rage.

THE crowd became silent, breathless. Lifto Latina smiled, flexed his mighty muscles. This was his crowning demonstration of strength. A wrestling match with the ferocious Orong. No doubt, it was all a trick. Part of the show business.

The chimpanzee possibly could have torn the strong man to pieces. He made a great display of attempting to do just that. But Lifto Latina rushed into grips with the animal. They surged back and forth in the cage. The helpers shouted, keeping the long forks ready for trouble. Lifto demonstrated he was strong, stronger than the supposed orangutan. He pinned the big chimpanzee to the floor of the cage. Again, the forks were used by the helpers and Lifto sprang from the iron door, smiling and bowing.

The crowd let out its breath and cheered the performer. The sideshow barker climbed up and shouted.

"Now we'll show you that Lifto has just faced the most vicious killer of the jungle! If he had

failed, this is what would have happened!"

The Whisperer saw a small, perfect dummy being lowered from the roof of the cage. The dummy was about the size of one of the midgets. It was fully clad, looked almost alive as it swayed on a rope.

The Whisperer swore under his breath. The dummy reminded him of the midget woman as he had first seen her hanging in the Haunted Cave. The clarinet in the sideshow band started playing a solo. It was a weird, shrill melody.

Orong, the chimp, had slunk to a corner of his cage after Lifto had got outside. The lowered dummy was ignored for half a minute. Only the red eyes of the big chimpanzee watched the figure. But as the music of the clarinet became louder, shriller, Orong suddenly started a shuffling dance.

The chimpanzee beat hairy fists upon his breast. Then he sprang, furiously snarling. His curved claws tore at the hanging dummy. His white fangs ripped off its limbs. In five seconds, the dummy was shredded cloth and sawdust on the floor of the cage.

Orong still danced with rage, baring his fangs at the crowd.

The "killing" was so realistic that women let out little screams. The Whisperer was looking at Delma, the dancing girl. None was glancing in her direction from the crowd. The painted smile was gone temporarily from her pretty face.

Delma was staring at the "killing" scene in Orong's cage as if she imagined it was real. Perhaps, like The Whisperer, she was thinking of the hanged midget woman.

THE barker proclaimed the next big attraction would be outside. Rocco Latina was about to make his death-defying dive of the afternoon into the small tank of black oil. The crowd moved in a wave for the entrance. The Whisperer was moving with others when he suddenly slipped to one side.

A sleekly dressed man, with black hair as smooth as patent leather and button eyes showing in a face of doughy white, had stepped over to the platform of the dancing girls. Delma dropped to one rounded, bare knee. The man was speaking rapidly.

The Whisperer could not see the man's lips, but he could read the movement of Delma's scarlet mouth.

The dancing girl was saying, "No! No! I can't let you do that!"

Then the tall Fiver Fabian loomed in a doorway of the building. The dancing girl seemed to turn pale under her rouge and sprang to her feet. The doughy-faced man swung around, saw Fiver Fabian and hastily joined the last of the straggling crowd.

Fiver Fabian crossed the sawdust floor. The Whisperer heard him utter an oath. The pretty Delma shrank away from him. Fabian was impressing his words with gestures of one huge fist.

"An' the next time will be the last for you in this show!" was all the speech that came to The Whisperer.

The sleek, dough-faced man was Snow Grimes. The Whisperer glided from the sideshow building, keeping the mobleader in sight. Old Quick Trigger must have been correct in his surmise there was something between the performers and the chief of the mob.

As The Whisperer was emerging into the brilliant sunlight of Crazyland's midway outside, he glanced back. Delma and all the other performers were coming out to make another stand on the outside platform.

The Whisperer caught a glimpse of Lifto Latina still on his platform. He saw the strong man dropping an extra bar across the door of the big chimpanzee's cage.

Delma's painted smile had come back as she reached the outside platform. But it seemed ghastly to The Whisperer. The girl's youthful body was swaying to the music that had started. The barker was yelling over by the high diving tank.

The Whisperer kept Snow Grimes' sleek, black head in sight. The mobleader was moving toward the park's entrance gates. Old Quick Trigger pushed his popcorn cart suddenly in front of The Whisperer.

"Wildcat, I've got a feelin' in my bones somethin' is about to break sudden," said Quick Trigger. "Somethin' that all the cops on the ground can't prevent. I don't know what it is, but it's in the air."

"Keep moving, Quick Trigger!" commanded The Whisperer. "I'm following Snow—"

The Whisperer ceased speaking. Snow Grimes had mysteriously vanished. The Whisperer glided to the park entrance. He was sure the mobleader could not have passed there.

All the thousands in Crazyland were at this minute attempting to crowd closer to the small diving tank. The figure of Rocco Latina was outlined as he stood on his little platform sixty feet up. For this one thriller of the afternoon, all the other shows took a breathing spell.

A band was playing dirgelike music for the diver about to jump for the small square of the shallow tank. A woman's high, piercing scream rang out over the music. Near the sideshow platform where Delma and the dancing girl stood, the crowd swayed in a panicky wave.

Other women screamed. Men called out in wild oaths. A wave of terror started near the sideshow platform and rippled across the midway. The

Whisperer wedged through, getting closer to the cause of the increasing panic.

THEN he saw the crowd dividing, clearing as wide a pathway as possible for the ungainly, waddling figure of Orong, the chimpanzee. Long arms trailing to the ground, shuffling along with bared, snarling fangs, Orong had suddenly come from the sideshow building.

The crowd had been so packed that only a narrow way was open for the hideously grinning chimp. The Whisperer noted that several women had fainted, but that the shuffling animal was paying no attention to them.

Several uniformed coppers were attempting to hold back the panicky rush, which threatened to become a massed human wave much more dangerous than the ambling figure of the chimpanzee could possibly be. Some in the crowd had witnessed the sideshow act. No doubt, they were still thinking of the shredded dummy in the animal's cage.

"Shoot him! Shoot the damned beast before he gets someone!"

One man shouted this. Others took it up. The Whisperer saw guns come into the hands of two of his men. He also could see that the most amazing marksmanship would be required to kill the chimp without bullets skipping into the crowd.

None saw The Whisperer's hand move to his mouth. One copper had his revolver leveled, possibly ready to take a chance. But he did not shoot.

"Put up the guns!" rapped out a commanding voice above the clamor of the crowd. "Let the beast alone! He's harmless! Don't shoot! Wait!"

None of the several thousand policemen in the department but knew the edged voice of Commissioner Wildcat Gordon. He did not have to announce his identity. That snapping command was enough. Revolvers slid back into their holsters.

The command had some effect in quieting the crowd, though a wider pathway was cleared. The Whisperer clapped the dental plates into place. His voice had been sufficient. The coppers there knew Wildcat Gordon was in the crowd, though they had not seen him. The Whisperer had no opportunity to change his identity, or he would have taken command as commissioner.

He was watching the sideshow entrance. Men should have been coming with ropes or a net. None appeared. Orong must have chosen a minute to escape when none was watching his cage.

Seeing that none had been injured, that Orong ignored everyone, the mood of the crowd changed. Fear shifted to curiosity, though no one ventured close to the shuffling jungle animal.

The Whisperer glided toward the sideshow front. The men on the show could do a better job of capturing the chimpanzee than his policemen.

A great laughing shout went up from the crowd. Orong had made for the nearest fruit stand. With guttural, satisfied grunts he was pulling down a whole bunch of bananas. For a space of perhaps fifty feet around him there was no one, except the man behind the fruit counter. The man was waving his hands and swearing.

Then The Whisperer saw two of Major Peppin's midgets. In the interval between shows, the midgets were munching fruit and sandwiches at the stand counter. The Whisperer could detect sly smiles on their small faces. They were too well versed in the show business to have fear of a chimpanzee trained to act ferocious at regular times.

Two men came running from the sideshow entrance. One held a long, forked pole. The other was swinging a rope net. They were shouting.

"Keep back! Nobody will be hurt! Everybody keep quiet!"

Even Rocco, the high diver, looking down, had halted in the act of balancing on his toes for his long dive. The band had ceased its dirgelike tune. The ugly Orong still was giving forth pleased grunts, stuffing bananas into his capacious mouth.

The two midgets from the show continued to smile.

THE sideshow men with the rope net and fork were halfway to the giant chimpanzee when a high, wailing note shrilled across the midway.

The Whisperer froze in his tracks. It was the piercing music of a clarinet. The notes were clear, the same weird strain that had been played when Orong had danced and torn the dummy to pieces in his cage.

The ungainly figure of Orong swung around. The bunch of bananas dropped from his arms. He danced suddenly up and down, beating on his hairy breast.

The showmen shouted, dashing toward him. Perhaps the two midgets from Major Peppin's troupe sensed their danger. They turned to patter away on their tiny feet.

Orong emitted a jungle roar. Possibly his animal brain was seeing only the swaying, little dummy he was supposed to tear to bits. He sprang directly upon the nearest of the two midgets. Horror shrieked in women's voices. Men turned pale and cursed wildly.

Orong's long arms swung. The midget in his claws screamed with pain, but his agony was ended quickly. Inhuman cries came from the throats of witnesses. Those who came seeking thrills, mimic horrors, were being given realistic tragedy in its most gruesome fashion.

Within five seconds, Orong flung the torn, mangled body of the midget man over the fruit stand

counter. The small body had been ripped as Orong had often destroyed the dummy in his cage. Orong beat his breast and roared.

It was his last, his death roar. In the shrieking clamor of horror, none heard the hissing of The Whisperer's silenced pistol. Bullets from the automatic pounded Orong's head, beat him down. Police bullets were added to a sudden fusillade poured into the midget's killer.

Coppers held the crowd as best they could, but many were being trampled. The Whisperer went into the sideshow entrance. Concealed from the roaring panic outside, his dental plates came out. He worked a swift transformation of his clothes. A new Army hat unfolded from under his coat.

CHAPTER VII
UNDERGROUND BATTLE

WILDCAT GORDON, commissioner, himself appeared. His cutting commands cleared the space around the fruit stand. Fiver Fabian loomed in the jamming crowd.

"Everybody out!" he shouted. "We're closin' the shows for the day! Everybody outside!"

Colonel Hammell, his wrinkled face working with emotion, was at Fabian's elbow. Wildcat Gordon stood in front of the huge, light-haired manager of Crazyland.

"On the contrary, Fabian, you are keeping the shows open!" rapped out the commissioner. "This is one time I want you to stick to the old idea the show must go on!"

"But this—great Scott, Commissioner Gordon! We've had one murder! It has struck again! Many might think this was an accident! It was murder!"

"You're telling me!" snapped Wildcat. "And this is how it was done!"

One hand reached under the fruit stand counter, behind which lay the horribly murdered midget. It came out holding a round, black disk from which two broken wires dangled.

"This happens to be a dictaphone loudspeaker," stated Wildcat. "The wires have been broken off and pulled away, so they can't be traced. That was the murder music for your pet chimpanzee, Fabian. Now who let that chimp out of his cage?"

One of the sideshow helpers pushed forward.

"The last time I saw Orong in his cage was when Lifto Latina was fooling around with the bar on the door," he said, with meaning in his voice.

"Dammit!" boomed Fiver Fabian. "You want to be sure of what you're sayin'! This is murder, understand, murder! The Latinas couldn't hate the midgets that much!"

"I am sure," muttered the show helper.

"Get back to your job!" snapped Fabian. "Commissioner Gordon, it is only decent we close the shows for the time!"

"There's nothing decent about anything connected with a murder racket," stated Wildcat. "As police commissioner, I order that the shows go ahead as usual. I have my reasons."

The formally attired Mayor Van Royston appeared. He was accompanied by Deputy Henry Bolton.

"What's this, Commissioner, Gordon?" demanded Mayor Van Royston. "Are you trying to keep Crazyland open with another murder on our hands?"

"I not only want Crazyland kept open, but I want the midget troupe to go ahead with its stuff," stated Wildcat. "It has been made to look. as if Lifto Latina were responsible for Orong escaping. I happen not to believe that. Let the show go on."

"I'm not taking orders—"

Fiver Fabian started to speak. The gray, deep eyes of Colonel Hammell met the Texas eyes of Wildcat Gordon. He touched Fabian's arm

"The shows will go on, Fabian, as the commissioner requests," said Colonel Hammell.

When Wildcat stated he did not believe Lifto Latina had let Orong escape, he was fingering a number of coarse hairs in one pocket. As he had changed identities in the empty sideshow a few minutes before, he had entered one of the side rooms. The coarse hairs had come from a sleeve in that room.

Mayor Van Royston started to speak again.

Wildcat interrupted, "When you think you can run this police department better than it's being run, you can have the commissioner's job, your honor!"

WILDCAT GORDON'S command prevailed. The shows went on. Four remaining midgets did a record business that afternoon and evening. Major Peppin's three remaining aides were showmen to the core.

During the late afternoon and early evening hours, Deputy Bolton, accompanied by Mayor Van Royston, deployed the added police guards here and there. Wildcat Gordon puffed at his stubby pipe and seemed interested only in watching this show and that.

Sergeant Thorsen arrived and they had a short talk. Wildcat's broad mouth wore a satisfied grin. He immediately issued an order.

"Sergeant Thorsen, you will take personal responsibility for the four midgets! I want them hedged in by your men here on the grounds, and escorted to their hotel by not less than three police cars!"

At this time, morbidly curious thousands packed Crazyland. It was close to time for the closing of

the shows for the night. Mayor Van Royston, Deputy Bolton and Fiver Fabian had been joined by Jackson Meldrum, the attorney.

There seemed complete agreement that Wildcat Gordon was crazy.

At this moment, Wildcat was close to Quick Trigger and his popcorn wagon. He saw Delma, the dancing girl, and other sideshow performers come out to the platform for the final show of the night.

Lifto Latina was there, his face haggard. The big man's eyes shifted nervously as unfriendly voices in the crowd assailed his ears.

Then Snow Grimes, with his sleek hair and his pin-pointed, dopey eyes came suddenly from a side entrance to the sideshow building. Quick Trigger edged close to Wildcat.

"There's a damned mob rat tailin' every cop we've got on the grounds, Wildcat," muttered Quick Trigger. "You know, I've got a hunch this whole thing is being built up against the Latinas an' that dancing girl."

Wildcat did not state he had been thinking of that for some time.

"Don't lose sight of me, Quick Trigger," he instructed.

Wildcat walked jauntily around a sideshow building. He was in the shadows less than two minutes. Then The Whisperer in gray was walking along the midway, munching popcorn from a bag.

The Whisperer again saw Snow Grimes with his brilliant, pin-pointed eyes, his slick hair. The mob chief was stopping here and there, talking from a corner of his mouth to different men. The Whisperer wondered if Snow Grimes had again been visiting Delma, the dancing girl.

This was one bad spot in the case that failed to harmonize with The Whisperer's beliefs. Snow Grimes' game was being too easily played. The time had arrived to trap some of his men, get at least one of the rats who might be made to talk.

The little, gray Whisperer was close to the entrance to the Mine Trip. This was the replica of an underground mine, in which patrons rode in iron cars drawn by smelly burros along a bumpy track. It was dubious amusement and not so well patronized.

Snow Grimes was talking to two men a short distance away. Suddenly, an eerie whisper seemed to come from the mine entrance.

"Your game is about played out!" were the words that stilled the nearest persons of the crowd. "The racket is ended for you, Snow Grimes! The Whisperer speaks!"

SNOW GRIMES and his men whipped around. None could have imagined that awesome whisper had come from the gray-clad man who was munching popcorn and climbing into one of the mine cars. But this time, The Whisperer intended Snow Grimes and his men should spot him.

"It's my last word to you, Snow Grimes!"

The mobsters could not overlook that final chilling whisper which had come from the mine car just disappearing into the low entrance. The burro pulling The Whisperer's car was slow. This possibly would be his last trip for the night. The car bumped and jerked through darkness.

Light glowed suddenly around a turn. Here was an image of a miner at work. As soon as the car passed this illuminated spot, The Whisperer whipped to the track. The burro plodded on.

The Whisperer crouched against the wall, one of his silenced pistols held club fashion in his hand. Voices of two men came from another car. One man was cursing and attempting to hurry a stubborn, tired burro. The Whisperer thought he had detected the tone of Snow Grimes himself, but he could not be sure.

The imitation mine tunnel was constructed of a material resembling black, slimy rock. The Whisperer set his ground-gripping soles firmly in place. The approaching car swung into the lighted space. Two men in the car were displaying rods, held ready for instant action.

The Whisperer emitted a ghostly chuckle.

"What was that?" rapped one of the men, whipping up his rod. "Whoa, you damn mule!"

These amusement mine burros never obeyed. Anyway, the burro knew this was the last trip of the night. The car bumped ahead.

The Whisperer lifted the clubbed pistol in his hand. He was intent on the car and did not see skulking shadows in the darkness behind him. Snow Grimes had been much smarter than he had guessed.

The Whisperer's pistol was in the very act of smashing the skull of one of the pair in the car, when his own head seemed to burst apart. The weapon rapping between his ears sent him nose down in the wet slime of the mine bottom. His brain as well as the mine turned to blackness.

THE WHISPERER awoke with a peculiar sense of being high in the air. Without making a sound, his hands explored his surroundings. He was lying across the broad seat of a boat. Reviving consciousness informed him, this boat was not in water.

"After this little ride, old Colonel Hammell can chalk up his Death Chute as the real thing," muttered a voice nearby. "And everybody has been thinking this Whisperer was something special. He won't look like much after this ride, and nobody will ever know how he came to be up here."

The Whisperer's hands and feet were free. Other voices told him there were at least four mobsters near the boat at the top of the so-called Death Chute.

The Whisperer swiftly recalled that the chute pool had been empty since the bomb explosion had wrecked the wall. Nearly a hundred feet down, almost a vertical descent, was the hard concrete bottom of the pool. When in operation, the deep water cushioned the falling chute boats. But now?

The Whisperer could picture the smashing of the boat when it fell. Not many bones in his body would survive such a crash. The mobsters believed him still to be unconscious. But his searching hands told him they had relieved him of all weapons.

One man, still dizzy from the blow on his head, could hardly be expected to battle four armed thugs here at the top of the Death Chute. The Whisperer lay quiet. The slightest push would tip the boat, send it shooting down the greased track.

One man said, "How the hell he got so close to Snow, I don't know. The boss has been playin' pretty dumb about that dancin' dame. Maybe that's where this Whisperer mug spotted him. Anyway, he won't be talkin' now."

The Whisperer's muscles were tense. He drew his feet carefully under his body.

"A nice, quick ride, buddy!" snapped one of the mobsters, and a flash beam played over The Whisperer's odd face.

There was no sign of consciousness, not a ripple of emotion on the face under the blur of white hair. Not even when the big chute boat was slowly pushed forward and started dipping downward.

"Come on, boys, let's scram before it hits!" rapped a voice.

The flashlight beam flicked off. The chute boat hit the greased incline, gathered fearful speed. One hundred feet below was the concrete. The four mobsters sprang across the top of the Death Chute framework to the narrow stairs leading down.

Below them was only fogged darkness. The shows had closed for the night. Only a few lights burned where trade trucks were at work among the concession stands. Until the resounding crash of the chute boat came, none would know that new tragedy was stalking through Crazyland.

The four, quick-moving mobsters were at the top of the narrow steps, starting down, when the wooden chute boat hit with a crackling smash that could have been heard for blocks. No man in that splintered wreckage could possibly have been alive.

"So the whispering mug was something special!" gloated one of the four. "Let's make it offa here snappy!"

A bunched, hard bundle of bone and muscle struck the speaker in the middle of the back. Knuckles drove into the base of his skull with such force that his spinal cord was instantly paralyzed.

The Whisperer had waited until the chute boat was actually on its way. Then his body had shot from it, his iron grip holding him to the side of the chute. He saw the mobsters starting down the stairs and swung by his hands across the framework.

THE mobster whose neck was cracked fell silently forward. His heavy body was borne by the weight of The Whisperer behind him. The steps were narrow and steep. The one of the four men lowest down heard the scuffling falls behind him and instinctively swung to one side.

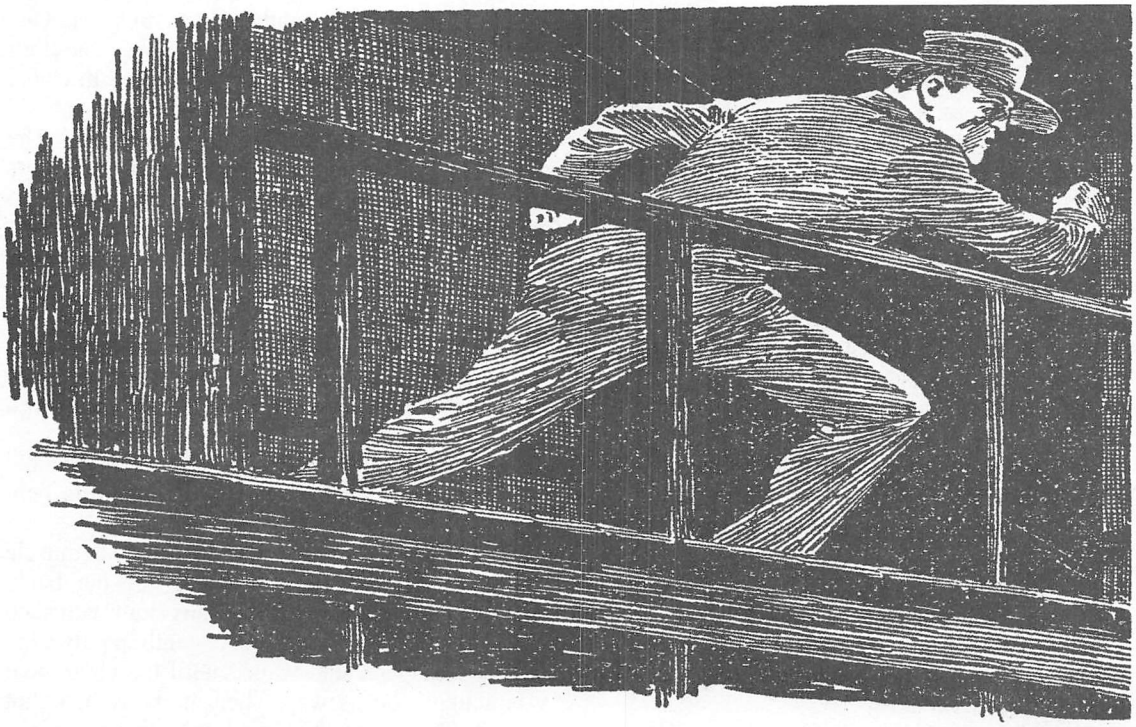
A lumped mass of bodies hurled past him. One man screamed as he went over the side of the narrow steps for a straight drop of nearly a hundred feet to the concrete. Two of his companions went silently.

The mobster who had swung aside was automatically attempting to drag a rod from his coat pocket. He glimpsed two glowing eyes, a blur of white hair as his rod came up. From nowhere came the smashing fist of The Whisperer.

The pistol blazed, but the steel weapon had been driven by the lightning fist squarely across the mobster's nose. The nasal gristle went flat and the world was fading out for the gunman when gripping hands swung him back to the steps. One more crash of cutting knuckles across the man's temple made sure he would be asleep for some time to come.

The Whisperer carried the unconscious man down the steep stairs. He could hear night workers on the shows running toward the Death Chute. Lights were being flashed on.

The Whisperer laid the senseless man at the foot of the stairs and darted into the shadows. He lingered there for a brief moment.



Fiver Fabian's roaring voice came to him. The manager was swearing lustily.

"An' I had to listen to that damned Wildcat Gordon!" boomed Fabian. "Look at 'em! Who are they? Hell! There's two! Over here's another one! Customers this time! Innocent men! Now there'll be hell to pay!"

The Whisperer was moving through the darkness. His hands worked as he moved. The siren of a squad car wailed in Crazyland. The night police guards were rushing toward the Death Chute. It was the jaunty figure of Wildcat Gordon who walked from Crazyland into the street, then into a drugstore phone booth.

Wildcat got headquarters and Sergeant Thorsen.

"Sergeant Thorsen, four men met with an accident at the Death Chute in Crazyland a little while ago," said Wildcat. "I hear three are dead. The fourth one will talk when he wakes up. I want him taken from headquarters and sent out to precinct number eighty-nine. I wish to have a quiet talk with him."

Such orders from Wildcat to Sergent Thorsen were not unusual. His "quiet talks" with mob prisoners often had astonishing results. But this time Wildcat Gordon had miscalculated.

"Sorry, chief," said the flat voice of Sergeant Thorsen. "I have the report on the accident at the Death Chute. All four men are dead. Three died from the fall. The fourth one had a bullet in one ear."

Wildcat assimilated this unexpected information with a snapped oath.

"Hadn't time to get him away," he said. "Afraid he would talk, so he was rubbed out. Everything's beginning to check, Sergeant Thorsen. I can't talk with a dead man."

SERGEANT THORSEN made no comment on this, but he said, "Chief, the mayor, Colonel Hammell himself, and that Attorney Meldrum have just come in. The mayor has heard of this latest accident and he's burning up. I heard them say it was reported The Whisperer is the real killer, the man behind all this murder racket."

Wildcat digested this information with a grim chuckle. He added something.

"And I'll wager it has been suggested the Latina brothers and Delma, the dancing girl, are working with The Whisperer?" he stated.

"That's what this Meldrum is talking about," said Sergeant Thorsen. "Wait a minute, Wildcat. Mayor Van Royston knows I'm talking to you. He is getting on the phone."

Mayor Van Royston was on the phone. His voice bubbled, almost to speechlessness.

"Where have you been, Gordon? You've heard what you've done, have you? Kept the shows open, and now we've got four more murders! It's this Whisperer doing it all, helped out by those low show people, that dancing girl! Another twenty-four hours and we'll all be—"

"Out on our ears!" snapped Wildcat. "Four men didn't fall off the Death Chute because the shows are running! They will be kept open if I know

Colonel Hammell's grit!"

Mayor Van Royston forgot his dignity enough to start shouting. He wanted the immediate arrest of the Latinas and the dancing girl. He wanted The Whisperer shot on sight.

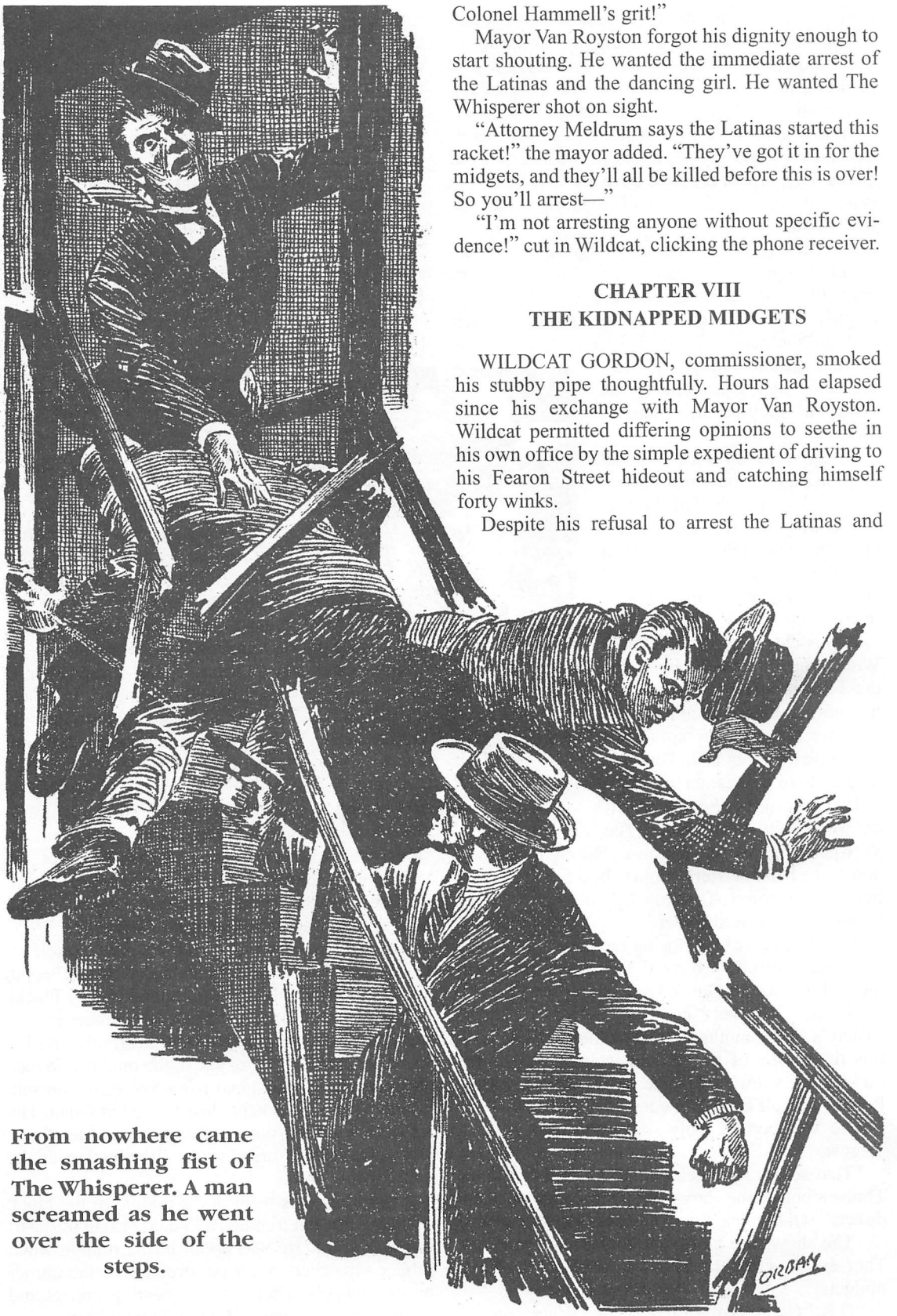
"Attorney Meldrum says the Latinas started this racket!" the mayor added. "They've got it in for the midgets, and they'll all be killed before this is over! So you'll arrest—"

"I'm not arresting anyone without specific evidence!" cut in Wildcat, clicking the phone receiver.

CHAPTER VIII
THE KIDNAPPED MIDGETS

WILDCAT GORDON, commissioner, smoked his stubby pipe thoughtfully. Hours had elapsed since his exchange with Mayor Van Royston. Wildcat permitted differing opinions to seethe in his own office by the simple expedient of driving to his Fearon Street hideout and catching himself forty winks.

Despite his refusal to arrest the Latinas and



From nowhere came the smashing fist of The Whisperer. A man screamed as he went over the side of the steps.

Delma, the case against them looked bad enough on the surface. The day's papers lay on the floor. Their stories stated that Mayor Van Royston was planning to have police act over the head of the commissioner in the Crazyland crimes.

It was growing dark outside in Fearon Street. Several times during his hours in the hideout, old Quick Trigger had reported over the telephone. He was still enacting the role of popcorn vendor in Crazyland.

"I reckon we ain't doin' so good, Wildcat," Quick Trigger complained once. "The shows are open. Old Colonel Hammell has got his dander up. Deputy Bolton has got a cop for about every ten feet, an' the park is jammed. I haven't seen Snow Grimes around today, but there are some new faces among his boys an' they're still hangin' around."

In spite of all this, Wildcat Gordon had not put on his shoes all day. When night fell, he was still resting his feet on a chair. Once, he made telephone contact with Sergeant Thorsen. He talked at some length, giving explicit instructions.

It was close to midnight when Wildcat prepared to emerge from the Fearon Street tenement. He had not at any time removed his Whisperer disguise, except for the dental plates when he talked over the phone to Sergeant Thorsen.

"WILDCAT" GORDON

Brian Boru, the Scottish terrier, would not have known The Whisperer in any other form. Through the long hours, the black terrier lay close beside a bed at the back of the room. The tiny figure of the hanged midget Lallie was still there.

The Whisperer was closing the door upon Brian Boru when the phone buzzed. He returned and took the call. It was old Quick Trigger.

"Great glory be!" came from the ex-deputy. "There's been another accident, but a lucky one this time! One of the curtain weights fell in the midget sideshow, an' I heard it missed Major Peppin himself by only a couple of inches!"

The Whisperer's reply snapped back to Quick Trigger.

"That settles it, Quick Trigger! Get to Sergeant Thorsen before the shows close! You will do as he directs!" Old Quick Trigger groaned.

"The shows are closin' now, Wildcat! Sergeant Thorsen has a double line of cops around the four midgets!"

"O.K.! Get to him!" snapped The Whisperer.

SIX mounted policemen rode the crowd back from the front of the midget sideshow at the close of the night's performance. Colonel Hammell stood to one side, leaning on his cane. Fiver Fabian and Attorney Meldrum were with him.

"Anyway, Major Peppin and the rest of them are safe enough," said Colonel Hammell wearily. "Perhaps I should close the shows, but I'll be double damned if I'll let these racket rats think I'm licked!"

"These racket rats, this Whisperer, they've got the police licked," stated the mellow voice of Attorney Meldrum. "If there's much more of this, there'll be no Crazyland to close."

Fiver Fabian said, "Then it won't be because of business, Meldrum. Hell! I want to close the shows myself until The Whisperer—or whoever it is—has been put behind the bars. But business? These two days are an all-time record. If those behind the racket think they'll win by killin' our take, they've made one devil of a mistake!"

This, indeed, was true. Throngs of curious thrill-seekers were even then being forced to give way before the dancing feet of horses bearing mounted policemen.

A big, armored sedan rolled to the front of the midget sideshow building. Coppers with guns in their hands surrounded Major Peppin and his three tiny companions as they entered the sedan.

When the sedan's doors closed, two police guards were on the front seat. A squad car rolled out ahead of the sedan, and another one loaded with coppers trailed it closely. Ahead of all, two motorcycle men were clearing the way with screaming sirens.

The wooden-faced Sergeant Thorsen himself sat beside the driver of the midgets' sedan. Major Peppin and his little people lived in a hotel twenty blocks from Crazyland. At this hour, the streets in this outlying section of the city were nearly deserted.

Two blocks from Crazyland, the motorcycle men dropped away at a signal from Sergeant Thorsen. The two squad cars kept close to the big sedan. The fifth block of the route was darker than the others. One street lamp threw vague illumination at the approaching corner.

The police cars were in the middle of the block when an old man trundled a lighted peanut pushcart into the street. He was about in the middle when rubber screeched. A coupe tore around the corner on two wheels. There was a crashing impact and the peanut cart separated into a hundred bits.

The driver of the coupe had his brakes hard on. The shock must have broken the steering gear, for the coupe climbed the sidewalk and rammed into a tree on a lawn. An old man screamed with pain.

The three drivers of the police cars jammed on their brakes. They saw the peanut vendor fall sprawling and roll into the darkness. The shadowy figure of the driver of the coupe was rapidly becoming what is known as a "hit-and-run" offender.

Sergeant Thorsen himself sprang from the midgets' sedan.

"Get that driver!" he bellowed. "All of you! Pile out and surround the block! Don't let him get away!"

Sergeant Thorsen turned to the driver of the sedan containing the midgets.

"Stick with your car and look out for trouble!" said the sergeant.

The coppers were spreading around the block where the coupe driver had vanished. Two men were beside the wrecked popcorn cart. One of these coppers suddenly shouted.

"Hi, sergeant, the old duffer ain't here! What the hell?"

SERGEANT THORSEN plodded over. The victim of the hit-and-run driver had disappeared from the shadows into which he had rolled. It seemed he could not have been seriously injured.

Sergeant Thorsen pivoted. His men were streaming across lawns, going between houses. One copper excitedly fired a shot or two in the air, as he imagined he saw the fugitive driver.

The man at the wheel of the midgets' sedan was watching this chase. None had observed the light closed truck with a bakery sign on its side. This was parked in the mouth of an alley only about fifty yards from the sedan.

The police driver for the midgets felt the darting, throttling grip of crushing fingers. An eerie whisper chilled his spine.

"Keep your hand off your gun and you won't be hurt!"

The promise of the voice was not kept. The copper made a dive for his revolver and dived to yell a warning. A padded sapper slapped across his skull. The driver slumped over the wheel.

Major Peppin and the three midgets with him started squealing in their high-pitched voices. One of the four midgets was a woman. The sedan doors were pulled open. Strong hands gripped two of the midgets.

Major Peppin was trying to sound an alarm when the penetrating whisper came to his small ears. The words spoken had a strange, quieting effect. Major Peppin, that dauntless little showman, spoke quickly to the others.

Before any of the prowling policemen noticed the attack on the sedan, the four midgets were being borne rapidly toward the closed truck. Each midget was held by an iron arm. These arms belonged to The Whisperer and old Quick Trigger.

The Whisperer drove the truck through the alley before the first scream of a police siren sounded. Quick Trigger was beside him on the seat. It was queer, but Major Peppin was seated quietly with the other midgets in the body of the truck. The Whisperer had exerted an influence that seemed to have mesmerized the diminutive major.

Sergeant Thorsen's coppers ran this way and that, uselessly. The driver of the sedan could not talk for some time afterward. None had seen the hidden bakery truck.

Sergeant Thorsen spoke flatly.

"Too bad all of us are due to be suspended by Deputy Bolton as soon as we report," he stated. "But perhaps our pay will go on."

The detective sergeant was strangely cheerful over this prospect. The men with him were the best of the force, coppers who stuck with Sergeant Thorsen and Wildcat Gordon no matter how tough the going might be. If Sergeant Thorsen knew more of this midget kidnapping than he was saying, none would ever suspect it.

Deputy Bolton might suspend the wooden-faced officer and be damned to him.

In the meantime, the bakery truck slid up before a tenement door in Fearon Street. The slatternly, bleary-eyed landlady stared in the dim light at The Whisperer and old Quick Trigger, at the four midgets padding up the two flights of stairs. She rubbed her eyes.

"One doll baby, he brings," she mumbled. "Then two—three—four. Maybe that black devil in his room eats 'em. Maybe I ain't seein' 'em. My grandmother's ghost, but I've got 'em again!"

The slatternly landlady went hastily back to a bottle in her room and sat there shivering, afraid to take another drink.

In The Whisperer's rooms, the eerie voice spoke to Brian Boru.

"These little people are our friends, but they must stay here, Brian Boru. Understand?"

The black Scottish terrier suddenly touched the chin of the erect, little Major Peppin with his long, red tongue. He wagged what passed for a tail with him. Then he walked over and lay down before the only door.

Brian Boru meant to be friends with these little people. But none would leave the room while he lived.

The Whisperer and Quick Trigger called on the landlady. She received her instructions to see that the kidnapped midgets were fed.

"I ain't so sure," she mumbled. "That black devil up there, he—"

The Whisperer slipped a bill into her hand. The midgets would be cared for. Queerly enough, they seemed to be liking their experience. They were making friends with Brian Boru, but there was no chance of any leaving the room.

MAYOR VAN ROYSTON was facing Jackson Meldrum and a raging Fiver Fabian in the police commissioner's office. Deputy Henry Bolton had, with loud oaths, completed the suspension of Detective Sergeant Thorsen and ten picked men of the plainclothes division.

"It's incredible, incredible!" groaned Mayor Van Royston. "You would think this Whisperer was superhuman! Takes the midgets, snatches them from our best policemen! What have you to say, Sergeant Thorsen?"

Sergeant Thorsen never blinked an eye. His face stayed long and sad and wooden.

"We were tricked, your honor. The driver beard The Whisperer's voice. "The midgets vanished in thin air."

Attorney Meldrum stated, "There is no doubt but this Whisperer is the chief of the racket mob trying to ruin the Crazyland shows. Where is Commissioner Gordon? Why is he never around when things happen?"

"It's just as well he isn't here, or he probably would try to interfere with the suspension of these careless coppers!" boomed Fiver Fabian, "At first, I was strong for the Latina brothers an' Delma, the dancin' girl! But today's horrible affair with the big chimpanzee has changed my mind! The Latinas must be in it, an' public indignation—especially over attacks on the midgets—will ruin the amusement park!"

The office door banged back and the glass cracked. Wildcat Gordon stood there on widely braced feet. His colorless Texas eyes, sometimes gray, sometimes blue, slanted from under his Army hat.

"You know a great deal about my business!" he rapped out. "The suspension of Sergeant Thorsen and these other men in this midget kidnapping has my heartiest approval! It will be suspension without pay! It was the right thing to do, Deputy Bolton!"

The long-nosed Bolton swallowed and almost choked. Mayor Van Royston pouted his chest and his retreating chin bobbed.

"Sense! Sense at last, Commissioner Gordon!" the mayor approved. "Now you will, of course, agree that Crazyland must be closed!"

The door opened again. A cane thumped the floor. Colonel Hammell stood there, his ruddy face florid with anger.

"Crazyland closed?" he thundered. "Murders! Now they snatch my midgets and I'll have to pay ransom, I suppose! We've got to get Major Peppin and my other little people back! But close my shows? Not as long as there is a performer walking on two legs!" Sergeant Thorsen and the suspended coppers trooped dejectedly out. Wildcat Gordon slapped his yellow shoes onto his desk, lighted his stubby pipe. "Well, what are you going to do?" rasped Mayor Van Royston.

"Nothing until something happens," stated Wildcat calmly.

Mayor Van Royston rolled his eyes and narrowly missed strangling.

CHAPTER IX
WILDCAT STEALS A GIRL

WILDCAT GORDON did not explain his fantastic statement. Plenty had happened. But now he was beginning to see direct light into a theory that none in his office would have believed. And confirmation of that theory, the production of the direct evidence he wanted, depended wholly upon the immediate future happenings in Crazyland.

Wildcat believed the brains behind the racket had accomplished nothing of what had been planned. Curtailment of business, closing of the shows had not been brought about. That was one item.

Lifto Latina had not been jailed in the murder by the chimpanzee. The dancing Delma had not been held on the handwriting of an extortion note. These were other items.

The mysterious and fatal activities of The Whisperer, which he himself controlled, was the next item. All this, he was sure, had been upsetting carefully laid plans of some supercrook. A crook with a brain far superior to that of the dopey Snow Grimes.

Yet, at this moment, the doughy-faced, button-eyed Snow Grimes was in a raging temper. Two score mobsters were gathered with him in a little room. Their leader's pin-pointed eyes spelled murderous rage.

"You dumb mugs!" rasped Snow Grimes. "Everything you've pulled has gone haywire! Our split on this Crazyland racket is to be what we collect from Colonel Hammell and the concessions! Now look what we've got! This damned Whisperer bumps off our boys, then he steals the midgets, and we was to work on them! Besides that, the big park is booming!"

"Then we've got to start on the other end, that dancing dame?" asked one of the mobsters.

"The dancing dame comes next!" said Snow Grimes grimly. "And no slip-up this time!"

Very apparently, whatever association existed between Snow Grimes and the dancing girl had

ceased to be pleasing to the mobleader.

Crazyland was booming in another night of record business. Reporters and cameramen were spotted everywhere. The thousands present were on tiptoe for some new thrill. Would it be another murder, some regrettable accident?

The Whisperer was wedged in the crowd before the outside platform of the sideshow. Delma was dancing invitingly, her young body moving with sinuous grace. The Whisperer munched popcorn and glided suddenly to the edge of the building. Here he faded into a corner.

Two sleek, young men were talking. One mentioned a fire. He said the dancing dame out there had double-crossed the chief. He named Snow Grimes. A few more muttered words passed. The Whisperer could not hear, but he was reading one man's lips.

The fire was to be an "accident." It was to follow this show.

"The dumb dame always goes to her dressing room to smear on more paint, an' she uses the gas plate for coffee," the mobster was saying. "You've got everything set?"

"It's all set and ready to pop!" growled the other man.

THE WHISPERER glided from hiding, mingled with the crowd and went into the sideshow. Delma was putting on her act. Even the crude, scarlet slash of her mouth could not destroy the dancing girl's wistful appeal. Her veil dance reached the limit in scanty attire.

The Whisperer moved when the dance music ceased. He saw the girl's young body sag, her shoulders droop. Plainly, she was bearing a weight of worry which she attempted to conceal.

Delma slipped from the platform. She walked toward a dressing room door at the rear of the sideshow building. Before she reached it, The Whisperer was outside. Darkness had come and the rear of the building was in blackness.

The dental plate came from The Whisperer's mouth. The dancing girl must not see him as The Whisperer, he had decided. He came to a low-silled window with a light behind its screen. His clothes had changed and his hair was rusty-red. He was Wildcat Gordon now, and his eyes did not lack appreciation as he watched the dancing girl swiftly altering her make-up.

Wildcat pressed to the screen on the outside. Suddenly, another figure was beside him. The hoarse whisper of old Quick Trigger sounded.

"Wildcat, I heard one of the rats say that if the dancin' dame lived, she would never look the same."

Wildcat motioned him aside. He spoke in a low voice.

"We are about to grab her, Quick Trigger. Stand by outside the gates with the car."

Old Quick Trigger turned away in the darkness. He was moaning to himself.

"Glory be! It's the dancin' dame! First it was the hanged midget! Then four more midgets! Now her! Damn, we'll be startin' a Crazyland of our own!"

In her dressing room, Delma was sobbing. She touched up the mascara around her eyes. Then she crossed to the small gas plate on which a pot of coffee was setting. The girl's hand started for the burner valve. It never reached it.

The low window screen crushed in. The jaunty figure of Wildcat Gordon was across the room with one bound. He hurled the girl away from the gas plate. Then his hand touched the valve and he sprang back.

Lurid, blue flame leaped up, enveloping the whole side of the room. Wildcat just missed having his hair singed.

It was evident Delma's scanty veils would have been burned from her body. She would have died or been fearfully scarred. The girl had one hand damped over her scarlet slash of a mouth. Wide, brown eyes stared at Wildcat Gordon.

Wildcat sensed the beginning of a scream of terror. His hard hand throttled the girl's cry. The explosion had been squashy, but the blaze caught the flimsy curtains as well as Delma's clothes hanging nearby.

The cheap building of wood and plaster might burn quickly. Wildcat's iron arms were irresistible. Clad only in her scanty veils, Wildcat had Delma gripped over one shoulder. He was forced to administer a knockout blow as he gained the darkness, for the dancing girl was clawing at his face.

He could hear the shouting, the rushing of the crowd in the show toward the dressing room. There was an equal rush of others to the outside. From the darkness sliced the blue blaze of a popping, silenced automatic.

A bullet bit into the muscles of Wildcat's arm. His free hand manipulated his own silenced weapon. It spat fire only once in the direction of the other gun. A voice squawked and a body hit the ground.

Wildcat gained the back wall of Crazyland and heaved the girl's body to the top. Feet pounded toward the wail from the inside. Wildcat knew he had been seen by some of the Snow Grimes mob. He paused only to spray the newcomers with his silenced gun.

WHEN he dropped from the wall outside, Delma was limp in his arms. A minute later, he had the girl beside him in a police coupe. Old Quick

Trigger watched the car rock away, mopping sweat from his bald forehead.

"We ain't doin' so good," he murmured plaintively. "I wish I'd left Wildcat in the Army, where he'd have been safe."

Wildcat drove recklessly, his police siren wailing.

Lurid blue flame leaped up, enveloping the whole room. Wildcat just missed having his hair singed.

He was headed straight for the waterfront and the penthouse of old Quick Trigger. His broad mouth wore a whimsical grin.

The doll-like, impulsive Tiny Traeger would love this! Wildcat appeared with a much less than half-clad girl whose painted, scarlet mouth was surely no recommendation.

Nevertheless, Wildcat had Delma in his arms as the elevator shot him through the concrete column to the penthouse. Tiny Traeger called from the kitchen, but Wildcat carried Delma quickly into his own room. He closed the door, but he knew it was promptly opened behind him.

Wildcat was bending over the veiled body of the girl, chafing her wrists when he heard Tiny's sharply let out breath. Delma was moving, murmuring, "Jalo—sweetheart—I love you—I—"

Tiny Traeger possibly did not hear the word Jalo.

"So it has happened at last!" snapped the blue-eyed girl. "You dare to bring one of your many women here—here into my house, Wildcat Gordon! I've known all the time you were—"

"Shut up!" rapped out Wildcat. "Bring the brandy bottle! Get this girl one of your coats and a hat!"

"Why, I'll do nothing of—"

Wildcat whirled upon Tiny. His eyes blazed.

"Get 'em! No foolin'! We've been followed here! Understand?"

"You can't talk to me like that!" blazed Tiny. "Oh, Wildcat!"

Like any other woman, she was fire one instant and tears the next. She went to bring the coat and hat.

Wildcat saw Delma's eyes open. He bent over her.

"Listen to me," he said quietly. "No hysterics. We've been followed here. I'll tell you where you are and how to leave. Some of the Snow Grimes mob saw me when I took you from Crazyland. That means trouble. But there are others."

The dancing girl's brown eyes warmed to Wildcat's words.

"Snow Grimes?" she murmured. "You're Wildcat Gordon. I'll do anything you say."

"Well, I like that!" flared the voice of Tiny Traeger.

Tiny threw a coat and hat ungraciously on the floor and started out of the room.

"Tiny," said Wildcat, "Mayor Van Royston and two other men are now on their way up here. There may be others soon. But you haven't seen any one here, understand?"

A WARNING buzzer in Wildcat's room sounded as the elevator door opened. Tiny went into the hallway. Swathed in Tiny's coat and wearing her hat, Delma was led by Wildcat through the door of his dressing room.

This room had no windows, no other door. Racks of gorgeous suits hung along one side. At the other end was the shower bath. A dresser and mirror completed the furnishings. Wildcat touched the rack of clothes. The suits moved aside.

"Remember, straight to your hotel, dress and forget everything but that you were taken ill and left the show," he instructed. "Other than that, you know nothing."

The dancing girl looked at him with wide, brown eyes. One small hand wiped some of the scarlet paint from her mouth.

"I think I should kiss you for what you've done," she murmured.

"Like hell an' all you will!" gritted Wildcat. "Get going!"

Ten seconds later, he was back in his larger room, puffing at his pipe, yellow shoes on a table. Mayor Van Royston, Fiver Fabian, Attorney Meldrum and Deputy Bolton shoved into the room.

"Where is she, Gordon?" demanded Mayor Van Royston. "What did you do with her? That was quick work, commissioner! You must have seen her commit the murder!"

Wildcat blew a smoke ring toward the ceiling.

"Where is who, your honor? And what murder? I've been taking it easy tonight here at home. Tiny, is it you who committed a murder?"

The blue-eyed Tiny glared at him, tossed her black curls.

But she said, "What are they talking about, Wildcat? Can't you stay at home one evening in peace?"

Fiver Fabian burst out, "Commissioner Gordon, you're not tellin' us you've been here this evenin'? You didn't bring Delma from the show up here? I've tried to believe in that girl, but murder's murder, an' this is another one!"

"Let's get this straight," said Wildcat quietly. "Who has been murdered this time?"

Deputy Bolton was stalking about the room. He went into the hallway. For once, Wildcat did not interfere with his snooping. Bolton came back with a mystified air. Wildcat got up and threw open the door of his dressing room.

"Don't overlook any place, Henry," suggested Wildcat. "Poke your long nose everywhere. In the meantime, someone tell me about all this."

Deputy Bolton turned in the door of the empty dressing room.

"You know all about it!" he rasped. "Delma, the dancin' girl, shot an' killed a man outside her dressin' room window! Then she set the sideshow on fire an' beat it! We had word she was seen goin' over a wall an' that she got away in a car, and that you were with her!"

"Now isn't that Crazyland for you," stated Wildcat, puffing at his pipe. "So Delma shot a man

and fired the sideshow. Did the sideshow building burn? That's too bad."

"No, it didn't burn," exploded Fiver Fabian. "Luck an' fast work saved it! But what's this, Commissioner Gordon?"

Fabian scooped up a flimsy veil on the floor beside the couch. His wide nostrils sniffed suspiciously. There was a heavy odor of perfume hanging in the air.

Tiny acted unexpectedly.

"Oh, I dropped that there," she said, snatching the dancer's veil. "I upset my perfume and I forgot to pick up the veil."

Wildcat never flicked an eye as Tiny flipped defiantly from the room.

Attorney Meldrum said in his mellow voice, "Commissioner Gordon, I would hardly like to suggest that you are lying to us. I don't know why, but—"

Wildcat's yellow shoes hit the floor. Knuckles of his open hand rapped across Attorney Meldrum's pursed mouth.

Meldrum made a sudden, upward motion with a fat fist. Then Wildcat let him have it hard with a right cross. The mellow lawyer for Colonel Hammell sat down abruptly.

"I'll have the law on you! I'll get your job for this—I'll—"

Meldrum sputtered, but Wildcat's icy voice cut him off.

"Now we'll try the hotel where this dancing girl is staying!" he directed. "You say she committed a murder! Well, that's a mighty serious statement, and I want to see it proved! If you've got anything on her, I'll personally lock her up!"

SOME twenty minutes later, Delma, the dancing girl, answered the door of her hotel room sleepily. Wildcat Gordon pushed her to one side and stalked in ahead of Mayor Van Royston and the others.

"How long have you been here?" demanded Wildcat.

The dancing girl yawned. She was much prettier now with the heavy paint washed from her face. She looked little more than an innocent child.

"Maybe an hour, maybe more, for I've been asleep," the girl said. "I became ill so I slipped away from the show and came home."

"Yes?" rapped Wildcat. "Started a fire first, maybe shot a man climbing in your window, huh?"

"Fire? Shot a man? I don't know what you're talking about!"

The girl's brown eyes were taking their cue from Wildcat's Texas orbs. But Deputy Henry Bolton was digging into a bureau drawer. He flourished a long-barreled target pistol.

"I thought so!" he snarled. "Didn't have brains enough to ditch the gun! You'll come along with us!"

Wildcat Gordon took the pistol from the deputy's hand. In two seconds he said, "This gun hasn't been fired in a long time. You can see that. All right, little lady, we'll have a look at those dainty hands."

A bottle came from Wildcat's pocket. Thin paraffin covered Delma's fingers. Wildcat called and put two policemen to guard the dancing girl's hotel room.

"You are not to leave or attempt to go anywhere without my personal permission," stated Wildcat. "Now, gentlemen, we'll have a look in our laboratory."

Colonel Hammell had heard the latest news. Another murder in Crazyland. A rumor that Delina was accused of the shooting, that she had set her dressing room on fire. The others were watching the chemist in the police laboratory. He was testing bits of paraffin with different liquids.

The chemist laid them aside and shook his head.

"No powder marks," he announced "If the suspected girl had used a gun recently, the powder would have showed."

Colonel Hammll swore gratefully.

"Dammitall, Commissioner Gordon!" he said. "I'm beginning to think this is much more than an extortion racket! I've had another threatening letter printed! But the things that are happening surely are not helping racketeers make collections!"

A grin crossed Wildcat's broad mouth.

"You're right, colonel! And the things that may happen won't help them, either!"

Attorney Meldrum spoke from his swollen mouth.

"Perhaps the commissioner—who says he knows nothing about the murder—would submit to a paraffin test of his own hands," he suggested.

"Sure!" snapped Wildcat. "And you'll find powder in the skin! As long as I'm commissioner, you'll probably always find gunpowder in my skin! I practice target shooting every day, and sometimes at night!"

Deputy Bolton swore, and Colonel Hammell smiled a little.

Mayor Van Royston announced they would return to Wildcat's penthouse. "We're figuring out right now—tonight—how this crime wave is to be stopped," said the mayor pompously.

CHAPTER X
TINY DISAPPEARS

IN the meantime, dainty Tiny Traeger was furiously angry. Wildcat taking up with a dancing girl! Bringing her to the penthouse! Shielding her,

when no doubt she must have committed a murder! Well, if that was the kind of girl Wildcat wanted, she would see what she could do about it!

These were Tiny's angry thoughts. She knew exactly how Delma had disappeared from Wildcat's rooms. It was well that she did.

Tiny was alone. The impetuous girl stamped one foot. The foot was bare. Tiny had pulled off her shoes and stockings. A minute later, she had taken off several other garments. She wrapped the dancing girl's veil around her slim figure and stepped in front of Wildcat's long mirror.

Tiny pulled her black curls around her face. She smeared lipstick heavily across her curving mouth. Still she scowled at herself. Tiny was perfect enough in every way, but she did not like this effect of herself attired as scantily as a dancing girl.

Standing there in little more than the veil and her clustering curls, Tiny let out a sudden scream. For incredibly, two ugly, bearded faces had appeared in the mirror beside her own. They were leering, smirking faces with avid eyes sweeping over Tiny's attractive figure.

The two men were moving. Doubtless they were some of the Snow Grimes mob who had trailed the kidnapped dancing girl to Wildcat's penthouse room.

Tiny did more than scream. The two men were close and one pair of hands was reaching to seize one bared shoulder when she sprang lightly to one side.

The door of Wildcat's dressing room luckily was open. Tiny went through the doorway with the veil streaming.

Before the men could reach the door, she had it closed and a bolt shot into place.

THE pair of mobsters swore vilely and hammered suddenly on the door with the butts of their rods. A thin wooden panel was splintering. Tiny darted to one side. From Wildcat's dresser drawer, she snatched a heavy police revolver that belonged to Quick Trigger.

"Get away—stay out!" she called.

One mobster laughed harshly and uttered a ribald oath. His hand was thrust through the splintered panel. Tiny used both small hands to steady the heavy revolver. Explosions were like a cannon in the small dressing room. One mobster yelled with pain. He fell backward, and Tiny could hear his body flopping down.

The other man's rod suddenly spoke. Slugs smashed through the door. Tiny backed among the gorgeous suits hanging on Wildcat's clothes rack. Her hand slid along what seemed to be a slight crack in the smooth wall. There was a low, purring sound.

The wall opened and Tiny stepped into an elevator large enough for only one person. It was like a round cylinder and it was set in what seemed to be a square column of solid concrete.

Wildcat had used that means of exit many times. Delma, the dancing girl, had left the penthouse by that same device tonight. The cylinder shot downward toward the ground floor of the gloomy, empty warehouse.

A cursing mobster broke into the dressing room, spent minutes in a futile search. He dragged the body of his companion with him toward the regular elevator. A trail of blood marked the passage across the rug in Wildcat's room.

Tiny was wrapped in one of Wildcat's raincoats. Under it was only the dancer's veil. She had put on a pair of Wildcat's clumsy yellow shoes. On the ground floor, she opened the cylinder elevator and started to step into the darkness.

There were shadowy figures of men crouching between the girl and the street entrance. Tiny was forced to creep quietly behind some boxes piled in one corner.

"TINY" TRAEGER

AT about this time a long, powerful car pulled up in

front of the Quick Trigger warehouse. It was a sleek sedan. A liveried chauffeur was at the wheel. Mayor Van Royston was talking importantly in the rear of the car.

"You may be sure, Mr. Meldrum, that Commissioner Gordon's actions tonight will bear fruit before the reform party committee," he was assuring the attorney who had been smacked down.

Meldrum seemed to have overcome his burst of temper.

"I have no personal feeling, Mayor Van Royston," he stated. "But it is clear your commissioner is getting nowhere in this Crazyland extortion racket. I haven't the slightest doubt but that the three Latina brothers and Delma should have been locked up in the beginning. Fabian admits they have been dissatisfied with their pay, and that they hated the midget troupe because they were popular and possibly getting more money."

Fiver Fabian grunted in protest.

"Sometimes I think you're right, Meldrum," he stated. "But I still don't know. Dammit! I'd have put my last cent on the Latinas as being good hard-workin' boys, an' on the girl. Now, I'm not sure."

As the mayor's car had left headquarters for his penthouse, Wildcat had shot across town in his coupe. His reckless speed put him in Fearon Street in a few minutes.

Old Quick Trigger was in the tenement with Brian Boru and the midgets. Again, Major Peppin and his little people appeared to be contented with their captivity. Wildcat changed swiftly to The Whisperer before he made sure the midgets were safe.

In a matter of seconds, he was Wildcat Gordon again, his coupe flipping around steel pillars of the "el," headed for the penthouse. He knew he would not be far behind the mayor's car. Wildcat's broad mouth was a grim line.

He had decided it was about time that the pompous, interfering mayor and the long-nosed Deputy Bolton were sidetracked. For at this time, Wildcat Gordon was convinced he had uncovered an amazing plot. He was sure he could put his hands upon the brain behind Snow Grimes and his mob. Equally sure that Snow Grimes was only a front for something far deeper.

But he had not yet uncovered the motive for the discrediting of the Latina brothers and Delma, and the virtual ruining of Crazyland. For while crowds now thronged it, the wave of crime must be ended quickly or the shows would have to close.

This was heavy on Wildcat's mind as his coupe slid to the curb near the warehouse. The long sedan of Mayor Van Royston stood before the wide entrance. Just inside the doorway two shadows moved.

Instinct, a seventh sense, spun Wildcat from his coupe. He edged over to the building, hands swiftly transforming him into The Whisperer. Even then he was chuckling.

"Now if the mayor has only walked into something," he whispered.

MAYOR VAN ROYSTON and the others had walked into something. They were crossing the sidewalk to enter the warehouse when half a dozen masked men sprang from the shadows. Machine guns rammed into Mayor Van Royston's ribs, and the stomachs of his companions.

"Get inside and make it snappy!" snarled a veice. "Drag that driver outta that car! Lay 'em away, boys, until Wildcat Gordon shows up! That damn smart cop has some fast talking to do about tonight!"

Heedless of protests, the masked men threw Mayor Van Royston, Fiver Fabian and Attorney Meldrum to the floor, binding and gagging them. The chauffeur was pulled from the sedan and clouted over the head.

"Now lay back!" ordered the snarling voice. "This Wildcat Gordon will walk right into it!"

The mobsters had not seen Wildcat's coupe. As always, he approached the warehouse with his car lights off. Behind the boxes in the corner, Tiny Traeger crouched in Wildcat's raincoat, her small feet squirming in his yellow shoes.

She still held Quick Trigger's heavy revolver, but she knew it would be foolhardy to start anything against the mobsters. She heard one man come down from the penthouse and heard wild curses as he dragged a body into view.

The doll-like girl gripped the revolver and waited. She could do nothing now, but if Wildcat happened to walk into the trap—well, she had still several bullets in the gun.

The bewildered Mayor Van Royston was lying beside Fabian and Meldrum. He heard the men's exclamation over the dead mobster.

"Check another one to Wildcat Gordon—"

The mobster speaking stopped his words as if they had frozen in his thick throat. He must have felt ice crawling along his spine.

"Stay where you are! The first to move will die! This is The Whisperer!"

"The Whisperer!" hoarsely breathed one of the masked men. "I'm gettin' out—"

Rat-a-tat-tat! racketed a machine gun, its crackling making sharp echoes in the empty space of the big warehouse.

One man had taken a chance on shooting at where he believed The Whisperer to be. He screamed suddenly and his gun ceased rattling.

"I warned all of you!" came that chilling, deadly whisper.

There came a hissing, the slow blossom of blue flame, as if compressed air was being released. Wild yells broke from the mobsters. Two or three rods jerked out flame, but all the masked men were running.

Two never reached the warehouse door. That made three dead men on the floor.

"The Whisperer!" grunted Mayor Van Royston behind the tape over his mouth. "Now we are done for!"

But there was only the pounding of the mobsters' feet as they ran outside. A car roared as it started away. Mayor Van Royston and the men with him lay in stiff fear, waiting the next move of The Whisperer.

MINUTES dragged slowly by. Tiny shivered in her hiding place. She had come to a big decision: Just how she was going to carry out a sudden, wild, impulsive purpose without anything in the way of clothes except a veil, a raincoat and a pair of yellow shoes was a problem she would have to tackle.

Then out in the street a car came noisily to the entrance of the warehouse. It stopped. In all his jaunty glory, Commissioner Wildcat Gordon strode into the warehouse. None had heard The Whisperer depart, just as none had heard him enter.

"Hellamighty!" swore Wildcat, slicing a flashlight beam upon the bound prisoners. "Well, well and well! Three of 'em!"

The beam picked out the trio of huddled corpses. Wildcat started cutting the ropes. Mayor Van Royston, Fabian and Meldrum spouted wild explanations. The mayor's chauffeur was lying unconscious on the sidewalk.

"Perhaps the Latina brothers or my little friend, Delma, the dancing girl, put you all in this fix," suggested Wildcat sarcastically. "But we'll get upstairs. If anything's happened to Tiny I'll—"

Fiver Fabian had a showman's profane vocabulary. He ornamented the threats of what would happen to the mobsters in Crazyland before many hours had passed. But Meldrum was still stubbornly insistent on the Latinas being behind the whole thing.

Mayor Van Royston said, "It is The Whisperer's mob. Commissioner Gordon, you will drop every other angle and put all the force into getting him!"

Wildcat cocked one eye at the mayor.

"So, you think The Whisperer goes around bumping off his own men, huh?"

The mayor had overlooked that slight detail. His chin bobbed. The Crazyland crimes were getting a bit too mixed for his one-track mind.

The four men ascended to the penthouse in the elevator. As Tiny Traeger heard the lift door close, she slipped hastily from among the boxes. She shuddered her way past the mob corpses and made the street.

Luckily, none traveled this remote waterfront street at this early hour in the morning. Anyone seeing her would have been amazed at the raincoat pulled to her knees, the flopping yellow shoes and the white, perfect legs that carried her swiftly to a side alley.

Two minutes later, one of Wildcat's own coupes slid from the alley. White-faced, grim Tiny was behind the wheel. "Bringing that shameless dancing creature into my house!" she muttered. "Well, I'll show Mr. Wildcat Gordon a few things! When he sees me again he'll—"

The coupe glided noiselessly from the street. Tiny headed the car for the home of a girlfriend. At least, she knew where she could procure some clothes. It would hardly do to show up in Crazyland in this outfit, and that was her destination.

IN his penthouse room, Wildcat Gordon was in the doorway.

Fabian and Meldrum were having a heated argument. They still disagreed upon the responsibility for the crimes, especially for the attack upon themselves.

Mayor Van Royston had recovered some of his pompousness. He strutted before Wildcat and shook an emphatic finger.

"From now on, this police business in Crazyland will be under my personal direction!" he stated. "You've gone far enough, Gordon, and I'm taking a hand!"

Wildcat was staring at the trail of blood on the floor. The bullet-splintered door. At a small, silken heap of Tiny's clothes on the floor. He pivoted suddenly.

"Get the hell out of here, Van Royston! You, too, Meldrum, and Fabian! Get the hell out and keep your damned ideas to yourself!" he barked. "You fools! Don't you see they've got Tiny?"

CHAPTER XI
STRIKE OF A SNAKE

NEWSPAPER editions of the following day screamed of the open break between Mayor Van Royston and Commissioner Wildcat Gordon. Of new murders of mysterious mobsters at the penthouse of the commissioner. Of the reported kidnapping of Tiny Traeger.

All stories were linked with the Crazyland crimes. With the dancing girl, Delma, and a failure of the police to pin a murder upon her. Editorials demanded the closing of Crazyland until the murders were solved.

"We must get The Whisperer; he is responsible!" stories quoted Mayor Van Royston as announcing.

"The police should take Delma, the dancing girl, and the remaining two Latina brothers into custody on suspicion," was an interview given out by Attorney Jackson Meldrum.

"There is no evidence. Nothin' can be proved against the show people," said Fiver Fabian in one story. " The Whisperer kidnapped our midgets."

The veteran showman, Colonel Hammeli, had been interviewed. He had issued a terse, characteristic statement.

"Crazyland shows will stay open until hell freezes over," he said. "I have faith in Commissioner Wildcat Gordon. No mob of rats can stop my business."

So, at the height of its night entertainment, the Crazyland sideshow featuring Delma, the dancing girl, was besieged by mobs of morbid-minded customers. Deputy Henry Bolton was personally in charge of lines of police drawn around all the shows and amusements.

Half the crowd booed and hissed the dancing girl, Delma. The scarlet slash of her mouth was a fixed smile across a pallid face. The other half of the crowd cheered and applauded her appearances.

Wildcat Gordon had searched without result for a trace of Tiny. He had become convinced she was not a prisoner, but was on her own somewhere. He had missed one of his cars, a raincoat and a pair of shoes. So she must have escaped the mobsters by his secret exit, had been his conclusion.

Wildcat was convinced that Tiny, enraged against the dancing girl, might mix into this Crazyland mystery. Old Quick Trigger was again on the park grounds with his popcorn cart. After a day's fruitless search, Wildcat talked with Fiver Fabian.

"If the girl is anywhere in Crazyland, I'll do all I can do to help find her, Commissioner Gordon," was Fabian's pledge. "I've given our own guards orders to shoot on sight if The Whisperer appears again."

"Thanks," said Wildcat. "That order is good business."

Let the guards shoot on sight. But first they would have to get that sight.

FROM Fabian's office, Wildcat disappeared for a few minutes. Then he was pushing through the near-midnight crowd in front of Delma's outside platform. Clad in gray, a humble customer, he munched popcorn from a bag and watched.

Next to Delma on the sideshow platform was a sinuous, green-eyed girl clad in form-fitting silk tights. Four snakes twined around the girl's arms and body. Ugly, black snakes. One was a diamond-back rattler with a red, gaping mouth, but with poison sacs extracted.

Even during her brief outside dance, The Whisperer noted that Delma shrank from these snakes. The snake girl was designated by the show name of Charmon. The Whisperer noted that her greenish eyes darted to Delma. The eyes seemed to be filled with malice, with a sinister hatred.

The Whisperer thought he might have imagined that. Worried over the missing Tiny, he tried to keep his estimate of everything and everybody on the level of hard common sense. Then something happened.

The barker was harvesting dimes. The performers were going inside for the final show of the night. The barker was loudly announcing a new attraction.

"See the nameless wild girl from Timbuktu!" he was proclaiming. "She's the most savage creature in captivity! She cannot be shown out here, but she is chained where Orong escaped from his cage!"

Sideshow barkers are hard. He played up what he had to get the crowd. The mention of Orong, the killer of the midget, and the wild girl sent more hundreds into the building. The Whisperer had started trailing in, but suddenly glided to one side.

In the shadows beside the building, he had seen the shining tights of Charmon, the green-eyed girl with her snakes. The girl had slipped aside, was talking with someone.

The Whisperer heard the coarse murmur of a man's voice. But before he reached the spot, Charmon was returning to the show entrance. The man with whom she had been talking had disappeared.

The Whisperer's gray-gloved hands made sure his weapons were in place for instant use. He did not have to be told that more evil brooded over the place. Would another attack be made upon Delma, the dancing girl?

Four husky coppers—his own police—were ranged between the crowd and the dancing platform. The Whisperer saw the newly advertised wild girl. Clad only in skins, her feet bare, this wild girl from Timbuktu looked the part.

That is, she looked as much a wild girl as tangled, long blond hair and two long fangs protruding from her upper jaw could make her look. Her face had been made hideous by clay paints. The fangs made her appear to snarl constantly. Her ankles were fastened with chains. These were wrapped around a heavy chair in which she sat.

The barker warned, "Don't get too close to the wild girl! She is dangerous! Two men were killed when she was captured in the jungle!"

The Whisperer wedged closer. Suddenly, he was swearing utter his breath.

"The brainless, damned idiot!" he whispered. "What in the name of all the devils does she think she can do?"

The Whisperer was close enough to see astonishing, blazing blue eyes through the matted, false blond hair of the wild girl. None but Tiny Traeger had eyes like that. How had she obtained this wild girl job? Surely Fiver Fabian would have recognized her. Then The Whisperer recalled that each show manager hired his own employees.

This bogus wild girl was a good substitute for the killer chimpanzee.

The Whisperer made no movement, gave no sign of recognition. Delma was swaying her young body to the Oriental strains of pipes in the band. The press of the crowd was tremendous. Hundreds had to be kept outside, promised an extra after-midnight show.

Delma's wide brown eyes held a haunted look of fear. Her dancing was good enough, but her smile was artificial, ghastly. She ceased dancing. Charmon, the snake girl, with her square pit of serpents next to the dancing platform, was starting her act. Hideous reptiles were lifted and wrapped around her white neck.

Delma was standing back. The wild girl's horribly fanged mouth leered at the crowd, causing timid women to shrink back. The Whisperer studied every movement about him. What would happen? Something was in the tense air.

The sudden, shrill scream of Charmon, the snake girl, broke it.

"Stop it! It has escaped! It's deadly!"

THE scream hushed the crowd to a whisper. Four feet of slimy, glistening length, with black diamonds spotted along its body, had glided from the bottom of the snake den. The woman's scream seemed to startle the moving snake. It was a diamondback rattler.

All at once, The Whisperer became convinced this was one snake that did not belong in the act. A rattler that still carried its death-dealing poison. The snake coiled like a great living spring, red tongue darting. Its tail vibrated and it buzzed viciously.

Perhaps Delma had been under too great a strain. She looked at the deadly snake, coiled within three feet of her slim body. Without a sound the dancing girl collapsed, falling directly across the platform.

It all happened too fast for the four coppers to act. The crowd was surging back upon itself, clawing, striking in a frenzy to get away from that platform.

The Whisperer was jammed in this crush for a few seconds before he knuckled men across their jaws and cleared his own way.

A combined scream of women shrilled through the building. The rattler's triangular head was drawn back in the act of shooting the hooked fangs into the white body of the unconscious dancing girl. Then, over Delma's body, really snarling, now, hurtled a strange object.

Still attached to her chair, the chains dragging it with her, the wild girl from Timbuktu threw herself across the dancing girl. Her hands, with artificial claws, caught at the striking snake in mid-air. By the greatest of luck, the hands gripped the diamondback clear of its fangs.

The rattler instantly coiled in her hands. The wild girl attempted to fling the reptile from her, but its red-fanged mouth whipped around in her face. Then Tiny Traeger, the wild girl, screamed, trying to free herself.

There was a hissing that did not come from the snake. Two men cursed with pain as powder burned their ears. Butlets ripped past Tiny Traeger's face, but when they had passed she was holding the loathsome, headless body of the diamondback in her small hands.

Old Quick Trigger had been following The Whisperer. He knew his part at this moment. He, too, had identified the wild girl from Timbuktu. The ex-deputy was at the light switch of the building. As the rattler's head fell, darkness engulfed the screaming, panicky crowd.

"Stay where you are, everybody!" commanded the eerie voice of The Whisperer. "The danger is over, but this is a holdup!"

That final strange threat in the emergency was deliberate. The Whisperer desired, at this time, to maintain his crook identity. He was moving swiftly toward the platform. He heard Tiny Traeger utter a muffled cry. There was a bedlam of horror sweeping through the building.

The Whisperer played a narrow hand beam across the platform as he mounted it. Delma had recovered, was standing, hands beating wildly, as if striking at invisible enemies.

"Damn them all!" she screamed. "She saved me, and they got her!"

Tiny, in her extraordinary role of wild girl, had

vanished from the platform. The door of one of the emergency side exits was swinging open.

"Give them the lights before someone is hurt!" spoke the awesome voice of The Whisperer for Quick Trigger's direction.

AS the lights came on inside, The Whisperer was through the side door. He saw no one. He had no doubt but that members of the mob had been planted, watching for the moment when the poisonous rattler would strike down the dancing girl. Perhaps the brain behind all this really was aware of Tiny's identity.

Anyway, as the wild girl, she had been seized. There was no evidence in which direction she had been taken. The Whisperer replaced his silenced automatic, produced his bag of popcorn and glided onto the lighted midway.

Many concessions were closing for the night. Only good police work had prevented many from being injured in the rush from the sideshow. But the crowd was still hurrying. Some women were being carried. The thrills of Crazyland had become too frightfully realistic.

The Whisperer saw Fiver Fabian gesturing and talking with Deputy Henry Bolton. Fabian was shouting, and Deputy Bolton was nodding agreement.

"When he is most needed, Wildcat Gordon never appears!" complained Fabian. "This reign of terror cannot continue! I'm closin' the shows until the police get action! Listen! They say The Whisperer was in that show! Even with a snake threatenin' lives, he tried a holdup!"

Deputy Bolton said, "You have my order to close the shows, Fabian! Mayor Van Royston does not intend to tolerate Gordon's methods any longer!"

A cane thumped behind the pair. Colonel Hammell stood there. He hit the cane on the ground.

"I'm a stubborn man!" he shouted. "No one but Commissioner Gordon himself can close my shows! What is this about a new girl being snatched out of the sideshow? A poisonous snake in the den?"

"That's tommyrot about the snake being poison! It was harmless, but somebody shot its head off, an' now we can't prove it! I've never seen the new girl they were workin'!" Fabian was speaking.

The Whisperer glided away. He glanced at the cordon of police drawn around the midway shows. Surely mobsters could not have carried Tiny through these lines. But then he noticed that several women who had fainted were being carried toward the auto parking grounds. It could be done.

But in that wild girl makeup? Surely, the smart coppers would have asked questions. The Whisperer halted, turned slowly. He was looking at the lights going out on various attractions. He saw the hundred-foot Ferris wheel slowly stop in darkness. Its swinging cars seemed to be empty.

The Whisperer noted the Ferris wheel platform was next to the side of the building housing the sideshow. He strolled by the Ferris wheel entrance.

One man was there. This man was glancing around furtively. His manner was nervous. His hands shook as he closed the gates on the dark wheel. The man darted his eyes all around. Then they shifted to the top of the high wheel. The Whisperer's gaze followed. The cars on the wheel had ceased their natural swaying. But at the very top, one dark car was still swinging. And it was the only one.

With a hoarse oath, The Whisperer got into the shadows and went over the high fence around the Ferris wheel.

CHAPTER XII
BATTLE IN MID-AIR

ONE of three men was slapping the face of the fang-toothed wild girl, attempting to rouse her. His two companions were looking down.

"What a setup, high and safe!" grunted, one of the men. "Snow Grimes said to grab that dancin' dame, and here we are with this freak! Who the hell is she?"

The man slapped Tiny Traeger harder, but she did not open her eyes.

"Now we've gotta hang out up here a couple hours until after the high dive an' they clear the grounds!" complained one of the men.

Another mobster suddenly straightened with a startled exclamation.

"What the hell was that? Somebody's on the roof of this car!"

"You're nuts!" snapped another man. "Hell! Nobody could be up there unless he has wings!"

This man stuck his head from the side window. He did not see anyone with wings. The butt of a gun smashed down on his skull. Powerful hands twisted his neck, pulled him from the car and sent his body flying into a hundred feet of space.

The other two mobsters crowded to that side, rods snapping into their hands. It must have seemed to them that all the furies burst through the other window of the swaying car. The name of Wildcat given to Gordon had never been more justified.

The space was too narrow to get a rod into play. The mobsters could only smash at the figure with knuckles that ripped into their faces, battered blood into their eyes. The Ferris wheel car rocked, resounded with blows and curses.

Far below, those waiting for Rocco's high dive

gazed upward at this new mystery. Deputy Bolton was ordering the white-faced operator of the wheel to bring that car down. The Whisperer was driven to the floor of the car. In the position he employed his feet with deadly effect.

His powerful legs actually lifted a mobster and kicked him clear through one side of the car. The man fell screaming, to hit inside the fence, outside which a crowd and police were in turmoil.

The scared operator was being forced to start the machinery. The Whisperer was on the floor of the car, gripping the gun hand of the last of the three mobsters. Tiny Traeger opened her eyes. She was no doubt confused.

A fallen pistol touched the girl's hand. She brought it up and struck out blindly. The blow caught The Whisperer's skull. Tiny was preparing to add another finishing touch. The Whisperer's fist hit her on the chin.

Tiny, the wild girl, once more ceased to be wild. Forced to use the unethical trick, The Whisperer jammed a hard knee into the mobster's stomach. Then he clouted him solidly with his own pistol.

The hundred-foot wheel started to move slowly. The Whisperer never had worked faster. Out came his dental plates. Clothes were transformed. An Army hat was jammed on his head and a carnation pinned in his coat lapel.

Deputy Bolton led the squad of police meeting the down-swinging car with drawn guns. The door of the car opened. With the horribly fantastic wild girl in his arms, Commissioner Wildcat Gordon stepped from the car.

His face was bloody and bruised, but his Army hat was cockily over one eye, and his voice rapped out commands.

Tiny Traeger's eyes had opened. She must have realized the fearsome creature she seemed to be with her matted hair, the false fangs in her mouth and her skin-clad body.

"Wildcat," she murmured. "Wildcat, take me away—"

Wildcat Gordon gave no sign he heard.

"Fabian!" he snapped at the manager who had hurried up. "You'd better look out for your wild girl! I think the mob tried to grab Delma and made a mistake! The Whisperer was in on it, for I heard him! He put the mobsters and this little beast in the Ferris wheel car, then he beat it!"

Wildcat pivoted upon the operator of the wheel.

"There were four men brought her here and one went away, is that right?"

"Yes—yes!" exclaimed the operator, glad to say anything. "They held guns on me! I had to send them up there!"

"That's all right!" snapped Wildcat. "The fourth one was The Whisperer! Know what he looks like?"

The operator invented hastily, "A tall man all in black, but he kept his hand over his face and made awful whispers at me! Said he would be watching and fill me full of lead if I gave an alarm!"

"Put this wild girl back where she belongs!" commanded Wildcat. "I want Crazyland combed for a tall man wearing all black clothes!"

Deputy Bolton let out an oath. There were only two or three thousand men in the grounds wearing black.

Fiver Fabian agreed the mobsters must have been after Delma, and had grabbed the wild girl in the darkness. Sideshow men came and carried Tiny back toward the building. She said nothing, but her eyes were twin blue blazes of fury as she looked at Wildcat Gordon.

THOUGH some shows had closed, the dancing girl sideshow was to be repeated. Wildcat Gordon walked with Fiver Fabian and Deputy Bolton over to the front of the sideshow building. Fabian suddenly laid a hand on Wildcat's arm.

"Sounds like more trouble," he muttered. "Listen to that!"

Delma, the dancing girl, and the tall, handsome Rocco Latina, the high diver, were standing to one side. They appeared to be disputing violently. The subject was Jalo, Rocco Latina's brother.

"Jalo is innocent, but when he gets out, he's never going to hook up with a common dancing girl!" came Rocco Latina's angry voice.

"I won't quit dancing, and I'm marrying Jalo—guilty or innocent!" flamed Delma. "I'm some improvement on Charmon, the snake girl, and you've been playing around with her!"

"So, after all this, your getting friendly with that damned mob rat, Snow Grimes, you think I'd let you marry my brother? I'll see you in hell first!"

Rocco Latina's face was contorted with rage. Several persons were hearing the hot argument.

"You keep out of our business, Rocco," cried the dancing girl, "or one of these times you won't come out of that diving tank alive! Now get away from here!"

Delma turned back to her dancing platform. Rocco Latina walked away, his whole body shaking with anger. Fiver Fabian turned to Wildcat Gordon.

"Sorry you heard that, commissioner," he said. "But these show people always go on like that. It doesn't mean a thing. I'll bet if Jalo does get off, Rocco will be the best man at their weddin'."

Wildcat nodded and grinned.

"If we hadn't anymore serious trouble than that hanging over us," he said, "I'd call off my police tonight. Do you know any reason why Delma

should have been friendly with Snow Grimes, Fabian?"

The giant manager shook his curly head.

"There's somethin' screwy about that," he stated. "I've been afraid maybe dope was being peddled to some of our people. Perhaps Snow Grimes has been tryin' to shove some of it across to the dancin' girls."

It was a smart idea. One that had not struck Wildcat Gordon. And it could have presented a plausible reason for the mobster's contacts with Delma.

But Wildcat Gordon was not satisfied with the explanation.

A FEW minutes later, old Quick Trigger was appealing to Wildcat.

"We can't leave Tiny in that sideshow, Wildcat!" he exploded. "Anythin' might happen to her!"

"Nothing will happen to her, and I'm not tipping off my cards when I'm holding a full hand," snapped Wildcat. "Anyway, when the last of the extra shows have quit, I'm doing some prowling before I spring what I know! I'll see that Tiny is kept safe enough!"

Though two thirds of the shows had quit, the dancing girl sideshow and a number of other concessions were being kept open for a crowd that seemed to want to stick all night. One of the final features was the high dive of Rocco Latina.

Wildcat Gordon had not changed back to The Whisperer disguise. He was waiting until the grounds would be emptied. Only Wildcat knew of the final, fantastic plan he had worked out. For he intended that all the Crazyland cases should be broken within the next few hours.

Fiver Fabian came by and said, "You think we ought to keep the shows goin' any later, Commissioner Gordon?"

"As long as the crowd hangs on, it's all right," stated Wildcat.

Fabian shook his big head dubiously and walked away. All the rides had closed. It was the sideshow, the Haunted Cave and other places of mimic horrors that were getting the big play of the late hours.

A band came outside and was playing a dirge-like melody. It was the signal for the final free feature of the night. Rocco Latina would shoot his body from sixty feet up on a tall ladder into a tank of black oil only eight feet square. Its depth was but four feet.

The least slip, a bad turn off balance, and death or serious injury would be the fate of the daredevil diver. Old Quick Trigger was still in the role of the old popcorn vendor. Wildcat was standing in front of the sideshow. He noticed that Delma had slipped away from the other dancing girls.

The thrill-mad crowd ought to have been satisfied with the grim reality of murders. But these seemed only to whet their morbid appetite for more. Never in history had an amusement park played to such customers.

Wildcat moved back as Delma disappeared. He imagined she was only seeking some rest before the final extra show. He wondered at the nerve that had sustained the girl in her performance. To others she might be just another daring dancer, with serious question as to her character.

To Wildcat Gordon, this dancing girl had become a sacrificing, heroic girl, who would keep going as long as she could stay on her feet. He turned his Texas eyes upward toward the black-clad figure of Rocco Latina.

Rocco might have been raging at the girl a few minutes before, but now he was all showman. He teetered gracefully on his bared toes. Several times his body swayed outward as if he were ready, bringing gasps from the crowd.

It was all a part of the business, the hippodroming of his act to put the last ounce of thrill into it. In spite of this free attraction, the shooting gallery across the midway was doing a thriving business. Target rifles were cracking. The barker was shouting. Bullets whanged clamorous bells as they hit the bull's-eye.

A dozen men and women were shooting. Wildcat glimpsed the tall, long-nosed Deputy Bolton standing near the shooting gallery, watching the gunplay. Perhaps the pleasure-seekers were getting a vicarious thrill from imagining they were a part of this Crazyland battle with the mob.

Rocco Latina's body was balanced at the extreme edge of his little platform. Hundreds of times he had come plummeting down, only to turn and land safely in the thick black oil of the small tank.

The dirge-like tune of the band suddenly changed. A drum rolled. A trumpet blasted. Rocco Latina touched his hands over his head, started his graceful forward movement from the little platform. All at once that slow, breathtaking movement of Rocco's body into space was no longer graceful.

A thin cry of pain floated down upon the hushed crowd. Rocco Latina sprang upward instead of continuing his slow, turning fall. His feet drew up and his arms flopped about awkwardly for the part of a second.

Then it seemed the diver attempted to recover, get his falling body back into balance. But he had already turned completely over, was falling backwar' instead of face-foremost.

WILDCAT was wedging his way through the crowd toward the tank when Rocco Latina struck.

There had been a sickening crunch. The crowd, perhaps always secretly hoping to see just such an ending, groaned and turned away.

Two show helpers were jumping into the black oil. They pulled Rocco Latina's body out quickly, but the head rolled horribly on a raglike neck.

The diver's head had struck the edge of the tank. His neck had been broken. Wildcat and half a dozen coppers swept the crowd back. Wildcat's fingers were going over the body in that film of greasy, black oil. But the explorations suddenly ceased.

A scarlet trickle had come through the oil. Wildcat found a furrowed cut across the dead man's right foot. It might have been torn on a protruding nail. But Wildcat did not think so.

"Hold him here for the medical examiner!" snapped Wildcat, pushing around the tank of oil.

He rapidly ascended the diving ladder. On the small platform, he paused to swing his gaze around. The shooting gallery was directly in line with the platform. Spaces on both sides of the gallery were dark.

Wildcat saw Deputy Bolton dash around the side of the building. Then Wildcat started digging into an edge of the diver's platform with his knife. A battered, small caliber bullet came into his hand. The bullet had nicked the foot of the diver as he started falling.

Before Wildcat Gordon could reach the sideshow tent for which he started, Deputy Henry Bolton and two plainclothes men had pulled Delma, the dancing girl, from her platform.

"It was the damned dame!" growled Deputy Bolton. "She just came in an' got back into her place! Dammit! I'd know her voice anywhere, an' this time we've got the goods on her! Bring that pistol, Murphy!"

Wildcat strode over to the platform. The two detectives were holding the trembling girl.

"You heard the girl, Henry?" snapped Wildcat. "Where? "What's your evidence?"

"She was back of that shootin' gallery," stated Deputy Bolton harshly. "She yelled, 'This'll be your last dive!' I didn't hear her shoot, because other guns were goin' at the targets. I ran around there, but she had got away. That, was just as that diver broke his neck."

"Sure it was her voice?"

"There ain't any other'n like it I ever heard!" growled Deputy Bolton. "An' then I used my light an' found this!"

He held up a shining brass shell. It was a .22 caliber, long, the same as Delma's target pistol. One of the men said he found the pistol pushed under some clothes in the girl's room.

The dancing girl's brown eyes appealed to Wildcat. Her full breast was heaving, as if she had been running.

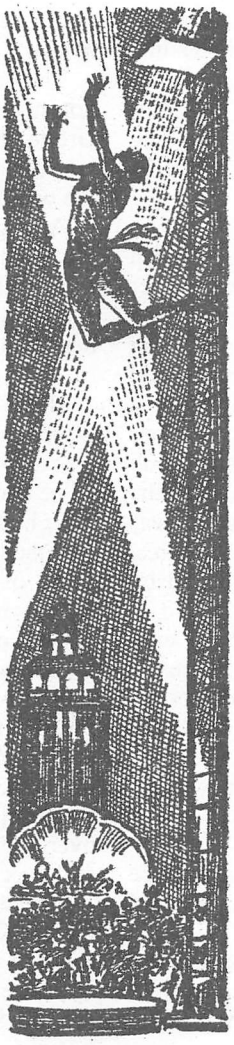
"Please, Commissioner Gordon!" she quivered. "I didn't even known my pistol was out of my hotel room!"

Wildcat was forced to shake his head. The bullet in his pocket would fit that pistol. It had an automatic ejector. No doubt, the bullet had come from that brass shell. There were not many target pistols like that.

"Where were you, Delma?" asked Wildcat.

"I—well, I was outside getting a breath of air," the girl said miserably.

CHAPTER XIII
THE WHISPERER'S DOWNFALL



TO the mind of any policeman, the case against Delma was open and shut. Wildcat Gordon did not doubt but that the murder bullet had come from the dancing girl's pistol.

He said suddenly, "Good work, Henry! Take her to headquarters!"

Fiver Fabian's huge head loomed above the crowd. His round face was filled with unutterable gloom.

"In Heaven's name, Delma, why did you do it?" he boomed.

"But I didn't—oh, you know I didn't!" the girl cried out.

"Too bad, Fabian," said Wildcat. "We can't change the facts. I'd close out the extra shows for the night now."

Wildcat Gordon's tone was bitter. He turned his broad back upon the pleading eyes of the dancing girl. But had anyone looked into his own Texas orbs, they would have seen a deep glint there—the gleam that always came to the fighting commissioner when he believed he was close to the end of a trail.

Wildcat strode from the sideshow building and into the darkness. A quick touch on his arm, a half-sobbing voice halted him.

The wild girl of Timbuktu was no longer a wild girl. Tiny Traeger was herself again, the blond wig, the paint and the terrible fangs removed.

"Wildcat, please!" she quavered. "I must tell you something! Then you must

see that I get home! I'll stay there, honest, I will, Wildcat! I hate that dancing girl, but a little while ago I was watching her dressing room—"

Tiny talked for a full minute before Wildcat stopped her.

"All right, Tiny! I'm sending you home with Quick Trigger!" he said shortly. "You stay there, too! You've had a lot of luck and you don't know it!"

"But, Wildcat, I was afraid—I wanted to help—"

"Try it again and you won't sit down for a week!" promised Wildcat. "Now get out to my car. I'll send Quick Trigger along."

Tiny's information had been important, but it had not changed the secret opinion of Wildcat Gordon. It had only confirmed his conviction. He was certain of the master brain behind the Crazyland crimes, but it would take direct, damning evidence to ever fix it definitely.

The murder of Rocco Latina seemed to be a side issue. Apparently it came of a personal hatred between the dead diver and the dancing girl. Their quarrel, the girl's threat, which many had heard, were circumstances good enough to convict Delma before any jury.

The last of the shows had winked out their lights. Fog crept in, its misty, gray fingers cloaking the place where there had been so much tragedy, so much bloodshed.

THE WHISPERER moved again. His grayish clothes, every part of him became a floating specter of shifting fog. For several minutes, he had been following the slim figure of a woman. Out of a fog came the bulky figure of a man. A door opened and the pair disappeared into a grotesque building.

The Whisperer slipped along the wall. The door had been locked, but a slender, curved steel took care of it. The Whisperer was inside, inside the questionable show known as the Grim Grotto. It was a place of horror depicted in lifelike wax figures. Of medieval instruments of torture collected by Colonel Hammell years before.

Only thrill-seekers of the strongest nerves ever paid their dimes to see this exhibit. Wax figures of men with red, gaping throats, of other corpses, of humans apparently being tortured by the medieval devices filled the Grim Grotto.

The Whisperer flattened to a post near one of the gruesome groups. He stood as motionless as one of the wax figures.

"You can't go on with this!" a woman's voice cried out nearby. "I hate her, but if that snake had got her, I'd have killed myself!"

Charmon, the snake girl, was speaking. The Whisperer became rigid. A man's voice spoke.

"So, you can't go on with this?" It mimicked the voice of the snake girl. "You hate her, but if the snake had got her, you'd have killed yourself!"

That voice. It was so faithfully a reproduction of the woman's tone, that it might have been Charmon herself speaking. Only it held a mocking note. Then it took on the guttural of the man's own tone.

"You'll go on with it, damn you! Or it won't be necessary for you to bump yourself off! It will be taken care of for you!"

The Whisperer moved. Inch by inch, he glided toward the pair. Here was completion of a chain, a final clinching circumstance for which he had been playing. He did not need to be told who the man would be. He had known that for a long time.

The Whisperer's hand gripped his silenced automatic. He steadied himself near a wax figure group, tense, waiting.

"I'm telling all I know, you hear?" the snake girl cried out. "You can't threaten me and get away with it!"

A short, hard laugh.

"I expected that, my dear," said the man softly. "So I had some of the boys waiting for us. You'll—"

The Whisperer started to whip forward. He had not suspected there might be others in the Grim Grotto. The warning in the man's speech was too late. What The Whisperer had mistaken for one of the wax figures suddenly came to life.

A long arm fell. A hard object drove the round-brimmed hat down upon The Whisperer's skull. Powerful arms encircled his body. A weapon smashed across his forehead. He went down into a deep well of blackness.

HOW many hours passed, The Whisperer had no means of knowing. Light in the Grim Grotto was the same, night or day. But his senses suggested he had been here a long time, that another night must be at hand.

First, he heard the murmur of voices. There were many of these. Every muscle seemed filled with aching pain. He was rigidly held, yet he was upright on his feet. The Whisperer slowly opened his aching eyes.

It took several seconds for the full horror of his position to come to him. His body had been firmly bound. Yet these bonds were concealed. The skin of his face and hands fell stiff. He could not understand this, could not know they had been waxed over, making his living features like one of those still wax figures.

Around him was the iron clanking of instruments. Now he knew he was in the mimic torture room of the Grim Grotto. At each performance, the customers were permitted to see these devices of the old Spanish Inquisition through a thick glass

wall. It was thus made to appear that real humans were being stretched upon the rack, tortured in other ways.

All the horror chamber operated mechanically. Wax figures, dummies were used, but a good actor was employed to simulate groans, wails and screams of the tortured. The Whisperer heard that voice screaming now. The control mechanism was outside the thick glass wall.

His slitted eyes showed a wax figure slowly being pulled apart on the terrible stretching rack. Now The Whisperer realized the faces pressed to distortion against the distant glass wall were show patrons shuddering over this realistic scene. Good show business.

Also, he was aware they were seeing him as a wax figure. For he was bound stiffly in the most terrible device of all, the medieval Iron Maiden. The Iron Maiden was hollow, in two halves, front and back. The front half opened on hinges. It was filled with sharp spikes. When it closed, these would be driven into the eyes, the body of the victim inside.

From a concealed position behind him a voice spoke. It was either that of someone The Whisperer had never heard before, or an excellent impersonation.

"You are going to die horribly," the voice stated. "You can save yourself. As The Whisperer, you know too much. We believe you know how much Wildcat Gordon has discovered. Tell us, stop fighting us, and we will permit you to join and share equally."

THE WHISPERER discovered his dental plate still in position. He said nothing. It was too incredible, too fantastic that a living man could be murdered, slowly, horribly, before the fascinated, amused gaze of scores of showgoers. He knew there was no hope, not with the ruthless cruelty of the brain that had plotted the Crazyland murders.

"Once the Iron Maiden begins to close, that will be the end," said the calm, emotionless voice. "None will ever know but what this was just a part of the show. What have you to say, Whisperer?"

The front half of the Iron Maiden moved slightly. The Whisperer could see the iron spikes pointed at his eyes. They fascinated him.

"Perhaps you don't believe we'll do it," said the voice. "Suppose I tell you we're stopping the shows of Crazyland tonight? Many persons will be killed. Perhaps this will prove we mean what we say. After you are dead, or if you join with us, this is what is going to happen—"

The voice went on. The thing about to happen would have congealed the blood of any man. An explosion, it was to be—a blast that would destroy and maim scores of men, women and children. No fiend from hell had ever devised more murderous means to accomplish his purpose.

The front half of the Iron Maiden moved again. The spikes came closer to The Whisperer's eyes. And those persons back of the glass shivered in mock horror, thinking only a wax figure was being enclosed in the embrace of the Iron Maiden of death.

A girl worked the controls of the devices from a little booth.

If the Whisperer had desired to speak, it would have accomplished only his sure destruction. Even were he removed from the Iron Maiden, it would be speedily disclosed he was Wildcat Gordon. The brain of the crimes in Crazyland could not have permitted him to live.

The Whisperer's slitted, tortured eyes turned to the thick glass only a few yards away. The rows of human faces danced like grotesque, mocking imps, their souls thrilling to this mimic horror, as the patrons believed.

At last The Whisperer came to a decision. He must speak, delay his own sure death, if but for one purpose. Perhaps he could prevent the explosion that had been forecast. Wholesale murder which would fix irrevocably upon one of the two surviving Latina brothers the suspicion of terrible guilt.

Again the front of the Iron Maiden moved. It was a part of the show that this action should be so slow as to be barely perceptible. The mechanism operated by the electrical controls outside the glass, where a hard-faced woman counted this only a part of her job and chewed gum nonchalantly.

The woman would have been stricken with terror had she known of the substitution of a living man for the wax figure in the spiked Iron Maiden. So intense was the horror that several of the spectators turned and hurried away. This was one show to which children were never admitted.

The Whisperer made up his mind to speak. He attempted this and only a whispered gurgle came from his throat.

The wax had stiffened his lips rigidly together. The pointed spikes were moving toward him.

None in the crowd pressing to the flat glass window of the mock torture chamber breathed for the moment. Then a commotion broke at the entrance to the outside room. A snarling, snapping bundle of black fur with bared, ripping fangs hurtled into the rear of the crowd.

The black bundle did not stop until it had cleared a way and had hurled itself against the glass. The weight was insufficient to break the barrier. The black bundle emitted a howling bark that caused the crowd to retreat hastily.

For the black bundle was Brian Boru, the Scottish terrier. The woman at the torture room controls turned. She saw a white-bearded old man,

long hair streaming, springing toward her with big, gnarled hands reaching. The woman screamed.

OLD Quick Trigger, still disguised as the popcorn vendor, trapped the woman's shoulders and sent her ruthlessly to one side. His keen eyes had caught the oddly pointed chin, long upper lip, the grayish blur of The Whisperer's hair in the Iron Maiden. He was not fooled by the coating of deathlike wax over the face.

For, not having heard from The Whisperer or Wildcat for more than twenty hours, Quick Trigger had acted. Brian Boru alone would be able to follow

Into Quick Trigger's right hand jumped a revolver. The butt of it smashed the glass window.

where The Whisperer might have gone in crowded Crazyland.

This might have seemed incredible, but it was no more so than other keen-nosed dogs following designated persons through crowded city streets, which has often been proved.

Strangely enough, when Quick Trigger took Brian Boru from the Fearon Street hideout to Crazyland, Major Peppin, leader of the midgets, had made no protest.

"On my word of honor, we will be here when you return," the erect little Major Peppin had promised.

Old Quick Trigger knew Major Peppin would keep his word. So he had taken Brian Boru to Crazyland. And the frantic dog was leaping again and again, in an effort to smash the heavy glass window.

Having thrown the woman at the controls to one side, Ouick Trigger grasped the nearest levers. He could see the Iron Maiden was closing upon The Whisperer. Then he detected the shoulder of a crouching man on the floor behind the Iron Maiden. No doubt, this was the one who had been trying to make The Whisperer talk.

The crowd roared. Brian Boru let out loud, snarling howls. Half a dozen of the brawniest coppers of Wildcat Gordon's department came bursting into the spectators' room. Quick Trigger's hard hands jerked at the levers of controls.

So great was his frenzied strength that the old ex-deputy broke some of the controls loose. He saw that the power switches operating the mechanism and the torture-room lights were over the controls. Behind him, the police were pushing their way through. A gun cracked and a slug flattened close to Quick Trigger's head.

One hand was on the electrical master switch. Into Quick Trigger's right hand jumped one of his heavy police revolvers. The butt of it smashed the glass window near him into fragments. Brian Boru was a flying ball of fury going through the opening.

The fiend crouching behind the Iron Maiden made a quick movement. He had the gleam of a weapon in one flashing hand. His intention was to end the life of The Whisperer. Quick Trigger's revolver blasted like a cannon's roar.

The heavy caliber bullet was like a wind blowing the killer below from his feet. The would-be murderer stayed down, but crawled toward a rear exit from the torture room. At that instant, old Quick Trigger snapped off the master light switch.

There was immediate pandemonium. Coppers shouted commands, attempted to check the rush of the crowd.

"Get that man at the controls!" rapped out a policeman. "Burn him down! He's wrecking the place!"

"Hold it, boys!" abruptly commanded an incisive, but unexcited voice. "Sergeant Thorsen speaking! I may be suspended, but I'm taking over here! Don't move anyone until the lights come on!'

Old Quick Trigger had elicited the aid of the loyal Sergeant Thorsen of the tough squad that had been suspended for permitting the kidnapping of the midgets. Thorsen and his men had followed him, wearing citizen clothes. The word of Sergeant Thorsen brought instant obedience. Policemen froze to their places in the shrouding darkness.

QUICK TRIGGER smashed out more of the window glass. He jumped into the torture room. Within seconds, he was loosening the iron hasps that held The Whisperer in the deadly Iron Maiden. The Whisperer clawed the stiffening wax from his mouth.

Brian Boru was whirling with the frenzy of some animal gone mad.

"No time to lose, Quick Trigger!" gasped The Whisperer. "The sideshow, rear entrance, quick!"

"Sergeant Thorsen's squad is backin' me up!" grated Quick Trigger.

"Get back then!" ordered The Whisperer. "Bring them to the side entrance of the sideshow! Keep Brian Boru with you! I'm going out this rear door!"

Though he had been bound for hours and his whole body was stiffened, The Whisperer drove himself, stumbling, sometimes falling, to the rear door of the torture room. He was barely outside when someone found the master switch in the Grim Grotto.

But when the lights came on, Quick Trigger was already leading Sergeant Thorsen and his men back onto the midway.

And at this time, in the crowded sideshow, Lifto Latina, the strong man of the three Latinas, was automatically going through his act. Rocco Latina was dead. Jalo Latina was locked in a cell, Jalo's sweetheart, Delma, was charged with murder.

But Lifto carried on with a strained fixed smile. He swung the big weights, drove a nail into a plank with his fist, bent a silver dollar with his fingers. Then the band started the climax music for the act.

Lifto bowed stiffly. Then he lifted the dumbbells marked one thousand pounds each. To be sure these iron balls were hollow. It was a show trick.

Up went the great dumbbells over his head. Now they were coming down. He would let them thud solidly upon the platform.

CHAPTER XIV
DEATH IN DUMBBELL

LIFTO LATINA'S best efforts brought only jeers and hisses. This show crowd had come to see one of those they now believed involved in

the barbarous murders, the atrocious killing and kidnapping of midgets.

Loud boos were uttered as the dumbbell weights were held high by Lifto. Men, women and children joined in this disapproval. Lifto Latina's face was white, haggard.

But if that pushing, jeering crowd had known what The Whisperer had learned, their hisses would have been silenced. They would have been fleeing in panic for their lives. For when the hollow dumbbells hit the platform, the jeers would end forever for Lifto Latina, for many of those closest to him.

While in the Iron Maiden, The Whisperer had learned the space inside the hollow iron balls had been packed with the most powerful of high explosives. The smashing of weights on the platform would set it off.

Lifto Latina, many of the crowd would cease to exist. The final stroke of the fiendish brain behind the Crazyland crimes would be accomplished.

And Lifto was already swinging the weights downward. Only seconds of life remained for many.

The lights went out. Soft-soled feet scuffled suddenly behind Lifto. A smaller, lighter figure than the strong man was thrown directly under the bar of the descending iron balls. The weight of them crushed him down, but his own powerful hands had caught the bar.

The hollow balls struck, but their impact was hardly a jar as the mysterious man's body took the full weight of that bar. It was The Whisperer. With great effort, he heaved the weights from him, rolling the dumbbells toward the back of the platform.

The surprised Lifto Latina struck out with both fists, believing he was being attacked in the darkness. In the show space the crowd was swirling into eddies of fear. Fiver Fabian's voice boomed out.

"Quiet everybody! A fuse blew out! Everything's all right! Don't move until the lights come on!"

The giant Crazyland manager was staying the panic. The reassuring voice of Colonel Hammell himself spoke. The veteran showman added to the quieting of the crowd.

IN the meantime, Lifto's flying fists were stopped. Strong hands pinned his great arms from behind. Old Quick Trigger and Sergeant Thorsen pulled the performer into the darkness through the side entrance of the show. Thorsen's calm voice spoke.

"You have just been saved from death, Lifto," he said, "We have Wildcat Gordon's orders to take you to headquarters."

Lifto Latina bowed his head and submitted. With what he might be charged he did not know.

Inside the sideshow, the lights snapped on: But the hollow iron balls of the dumbbells lay there as they had been placed. Hinged lids had been opened and the inside of the balls were empty.

The Whisperer had vanished. Lifto Latina found himself hedged by police in plainclothes in the roomy interior of a light truck. This had a bakery sign on the outside. Sergeant Thorsen drove the truck, with old Quick Trigger beside him. They had managed to get Lifto from Crazyland without being intercepted.

The Whisperer was faster than Sergeant Thorsen. He was convinced that this last stroke, the Grim Grotto incident and the new fear instilled in the sideshow with the disappearance of Lifto Latina would close Crazyland, at least for the night.

In this he was correct. Colonel Hammell rested heavily on his cane beside Fiver Fabian. The last of the sideshow crowd was out, safely.

"I'm a stubborn man, Fabian," said Colonel Hammell. "But we've had enough murders. Even now, I suspect the park is filled with mob killers. We will close the shows, Fabian, perhaps forever."

Colonel Hammell was right. At this moment, the doughy-faced Snow Grimes had collected a score of his mobsters in one unused building in Crazyland. The mobleader was quivering with his anger. His pin-pointed eyes held murder.

"The Whisperer has escaped, broken up the whole play!" he raged. "I've spotted him, and he is being trailed! He will return to Crazyland tonight! He is to be rubbed out, and all who may be with him!"

So at last Crazyland was being closed. Snow Grimes had passed the final word putting the finger on The Whisperer. Even then, unknown to The Whisperer, that light bakery truck had been spotted. A mob car was playing a side street, but it was checking on every corner passed by the truck.

AT this time, Attorney Jackson Meldrum was in Wildcat Gordon's own office. Mayor Van Royston was striding about nervously. Attorney Meldrum had a deep scowl on his usually mellow face.

"But, mayor," he said, "why should Wildcat Gordon disappear at a critical time like this? I understand the girl, Tiny Traeger, is home safe after some wild adventure in Crazyland. We've heard nothing from the missing midgets. At last, Colonel Hammell is planning to close the amusement park. It is all he can do, with your police helpless against this continuing murder racket."

"Wildcat Gordon has done this same thing many times," said Mayor Van Royston mournfully. "But this time, he'll never enter this office again."

"That's interesting, your honor!" cut in the icy voice of Wildcat Gordon from inside the door. "But I'm already in!"

The Army hat cocked over one eye could not

conceal the bruises on Wildcat's face. He sat down at his desk and slapped his yellow shoes offensively on top.

"Where's everybody?" said Wildcat, with cheerful nonchalance. "Don't you keep Deputy Long-nose Bolton hanging around anymore, mayor?"

"Deputy Bolton headed a squad that was summoned to Crazyland a little while ago," stated Mayor Van Royston, with dignity. "There has been more trouble there, and Deputy Bolton is usually on the job when a call comes."

"Good for Henry," approved Wildcat. "But it doesn't leave anyone but the jailer and a couple of men here at headquarters."

"Deputy Bolton knows his business, and a call to duty is his first thought!" snapped Mayor Van Royston.

Wildcat grinned and puffed an evil cloud from his stubby pipe. He himself had made the emergency call that had taken Deputy Bolton and most of the men from the headquarters office.

Just now, Wildcat was listening intently. He could hear the soft shuffling of feet back of the door leading to the temporary confinement cells near his office.

Jalo Latina and Delma, the dancing girl, were locked up back there. Mayor Van Royston was too absorbed to hear the movement. Meldrum arose and said he guessed he would be going, that Colonel Hammell intended to close the shows.

"You could have prevented that, Commissioner Gordon," he stated accusingly. "You seem to avoid all action and all danger, and—"

The office and the cell corridor back of the door were plunged into darkness.

"Stand where you are!" came a chilling whisper. "I have heard of your order to get me, Mayor Van Royston! If anyone moves, he's a dead man!"

In the darkness, Attorney Meldrum dived for the outside door. A hard-driven fist collided with his round nose and he sat down. At this instant, Wildcat Gordon's voice rapped out.

"You stay where you are, Whisperer!"

There came the double crack of a regular automatic. Mayor Van Royston squawked, "Don't! Whisperer, I'm the mayor! You understand?"

"I understand plenty!" said the awe-inspiring whisper. "Lie down on the floor!"

In the next second, Wildcat Gordon's voice roared oaths. There was the hissing of another weapon. Bullets whined off Wildcat Gordon's desk. In this bedlam, none heard the blows, the creaking of cell doors, the sudden movement of bodies in the small cell corridor which led to the street.

The lights came on blindingly.

WILDCAT GORDON was crouched behind his desk, swearing lustily. He was emptying an automatic at the splintering glass of the door. Bullet gouges showed across his polished desk. Evidently The Whisperer had intended to rub out the commissioner.

Mayor Van Royston's striped legs waved from between two filing cabinets. His body was wedged between the cases, safe from bullets. Attorney Meldrum was crouching behind a chair, his round eyes popping out.

Wildcat Gordon sprang over his desk. He could see a jailer with a bloody nose staggering along the cell corridor. The doors of two cells swung open.

The jailer was yelling, "The mob got that Latina guy and the dancing dame!" Wildcat Gordon passed up the sputterings of Mayor Van Royston and Attorney Meldrum. He lunged across the office, pistol in hand, and through the outside door. Shots cracked from his gun.

Two exploding motors sounded as a coupe and a light bakery truck shot out of the block. Driving with one hand, Wildcat Gordon was making a swift transformation. When he stepped from the coupe in Fearon Street, he was again The Whisperer.

The truck squealed to a stop. Only old Quick Trigger got out. The Whisperer was already on his way upstairs in the tenement hideout. His quick movements had prevented any in the truck from seeing him. Sometimes it was almost certain Sergeant Thorsen knew this role of his chief, but if so, the wooden-faced detective never had batted an eye over it.

Seconds later, the slatternly landlady looked through bleary eyes at a procession coming down the stairs. There was Quick Trigger, The Whisperer and the little row of midgets.

The landlady mumbled, "I thought maybe the black devil dog et 'em. But there was four went up an' now there are—"

No doubt she was seeing double. The landlady went back and gurgled a long drink from her bottle.

Outside, the police coupe remained in Fearon Street. Only the light truck whirled out of the block. Unfortunately, Sergeant Thorsen, at the wheel, did not see the two closed cars that had passed through an alley and were closely trailing the truck.

Inside the truck, Delma, the dancing girl, was hugging a little, midget woman. Jalo Latina sat staring at the girl, and the man's eyes told what he thought of her.

The truck crossed town, a bridge, and followed the shore toward the lessening lights of Crazyland. Show lights had been switched off. A reluctant crowd had been herded outside. Only a few stray coppers remained on guard.

Colonel Hammell had closed his shows. One bright spot of illumination was in the sideshow

building. This was the office of Fiver Fabian. Colonel Hammell watched his manager checking the day's receipts. The fire had gone from the old showman's eyes.

"Perhaps it's the end of our Crazyland," murmured Colonel Hammell. "We made it the greatest show on earth, Fabian."

"Yes, we did that, colonel," assented Fiver Fabian sadly. "There may never be another... What's that?"

The gray night of Crazyland echoes to a shot, another one.

CHAPTER XV
BATTLE OF THE MIRRORS

FIVER FABIAN'S big body barged through his office door. Colonel Hammell stumped heavily after him. There was no movement near the sideshow building. The shots came from the farther end of the midway, where all shows had been closed.

Near the trade truck entrance to the midway of Crazyland, a procession had suddenly emerged from a light bakery truck. The Whisperer apparently had vanished. But this was a queer parade.

Old Quick Trigger, Sergeant Thorsen, Jalo Latina, and his brother, the strong man, Lifto, were carrying midget people under their arms. Delma, the dancing girl, was beside Quick Trigger. Near the truck two closed cars stopped. Armed men streamed from these.

From an unused building on the midway emerged other men, all bearing guns. The hard voice of Snow Grimes was heard to rap out an order.

"I saw him! The Whisperer is back! He went that way! O.K., boys! Block the exits! Rub him out on sight!"

Sergeant Thorsen passed the midget he was carrying to Delma, the dancing girl. His own men in citizen clothes were already moving along the shadows inside the Crazyland wall. Now came The Whisperer's eerie command, an order that could be heard only by Quick Trigger and Sergeant Thorsen.

"Sergeant, surround the Crystal Maze! Quick Trigger, I've opened the door, get the midgets and the others inside! I will return!"

Then it was The Whisperer himself who fired the two shots that Fiver Fabian and Colonel Hammell had heard. Leaving the others, The Whisperer was moving with the ghostly speed and silence of a creature from the grave. His gliding movement carried him to the sideshow building.

One minute later, The Whisperer was circling back to the Crystal Maze. This was a long, low building. It was an amusement place filled with mirrors. Patrons could lose themselves in its myriad passages. The many mirrors were confusing. Anyone could meet himself coming in a dozen directions at once.

Colonel Hammell had improved upon the old stationary mirrors. By an ingenious arrangement, all the mirrors could be turned by movements of a single mechanism. They changed positions. At times they would be turned, presenting only black walls with not a mirror in sight.

TEMPORARILY, The Whisperer believed this the safest place for the strange, little company of fugitives. Lifto Latina, not yet understanding all that had happened to him in the past hour or two. Jalo Latina, the slack wire walker, with one arm around the slender figure of Delma, the dancing girl.

Major Peppin, that diminutive, nervy showman, with the three midgets who had been kidnapped with him. Major Peppin, whose tiny wife, Lallie, had been hanged in the Haunted Cave at the outset of this murder wave.

Old Quick Trigger, still as the white-bearded popcorn man, was piloting them to the farthest corner of the Crystal Maze. Dozens of mirrors reflected their movements, some distorting their figures, making giants of the midgets, midgets of the others. It was much like some nightmare of people in a grotesque inferno.

Sergeant Thorsen and his dozen loyal coppers—all suspended from the force—had disappeared. The Whisperer glided through the shadows, evading all lighted spots. He could see the massed body of Snow Grimes' mob. The mobleader was cursing wildly.

"They've brought the midgets back! The damned Whisperer is behind this! Get him first! Kill him on sight! Where in hell did he go?"

Two mobsters cried out and their rods flamed. Slugs smashed and splintered mirrors outside the entrance to the Crystal Maze. The Whisperer had appeared. His flying gray figure had been visible, then it was gone.

Snow Grimes shouted venomously. "Bring them choppers! The Whisperer's in there! The boss wants him! Damn 'em! He wants them all! Turn the choppers loose! Burn the midgets, the Latinas and that damned dancin' dame! Make it a cleanup, boys, then we'll lam out and lay low!"

Inside the first passage, The Whisperer heard the command to blot him out. To chop down the midgets, the Latinas, the brown-eyed Delma. Strange, profane chuckles came from his throat. Sure, they would want to make it a cleanup!

Snow Grimes meant for the midgets to die, for the Latinas, for the dancing girl as well as The Whisperer. And The Whisperer knew exactly why.

The Whisperer miscalculated on the speed of the mob's rush. Snow Grimes was urging at least two score killers into the entrance of the Crystal maze.

The Whisperer had reached the main passage with its first curving, confusing mirrors in ceiling, walls and floor. He was making for the mechanism that swung these mirrors.

But the first gunmen of the mob burst in. A "chopper" ripped out its death blast. The Whisperer fell, flattening as the lead streamed over him. Slugs plucked at his gray clothing. His round-brimmed hat was whisked off, leaving a mop of blurred gray hair.

The Whisperer turned on one side, set a hissing automatic into action. The man with the chopper went down, but his place was filled by another. Searing pains ground along The Whisperer's legs. Bullets scored the flesh.

Death whined around The Whisperer's ears. He rolled out of the main passage. This second machine gun could not be evaded. His one silenced pistol was empty. He knew Sergeant Thorsen and his men were outside, but they had been given instructions to wait until all the mob had entered the Crystal Maze.

The Whisperer saw now his hope to entrap Snow Grimes, his mob, and perhaps the real brains of the Crazyland crimes, was misplaced. It had been a mistake to have Sergeant Thorsen and the others wait.

THE machine gun let go with a terrific hammering of lead. Glass shattered, tinkled to the floor. The Whisperer breathed. The mirrors had given him a brief respite. The second gunman had been shooting at The Whisperer's image on the floor in the nearest mirror.

A few feet more, crawling, and The Whisperer knew he might reach the mirror control room, if his bullet-riddled muscles would support him. Now the passageway near the entrance was choked with the men of Snow Grimes. Safely in their rear, the voice of the mob chief urged them on. Then The Whisperer heard Snow Grimes shout.

"What the hell's holding you back! Give me that chopper! Let me in there!"

The doughy-faced leader shoved through his men. He caught the machine gun, aiming it. He was making no mistake. No mirror illusion fooled him. That gun was pointed at the gray, huddled Whisperer.

"Damn alla you!" shouted the voice of old Quick Trigger. "Drop that chopper, Grimes, before I—"

Quick Trigger was coming from the rear of the first Crystal Maze passageway. He had leveled one of his big revolvers upon Snow Grimes. From beside the mobleader a rod spat fire.

Old Quick Trigger turned halfway around, his right arm jerking back and his revolver crashing to the glass floor.

"Well, you'll take it, too!" grated Snow Grimes, swinging the machine gun away from The Whisperer. "Alla you get it, an' no mistake!"

The Whisperer was on his hands and knees. Another figure leaped into a dozen mirrors at once. It was fantastic. The white-faced, brown-eyed dancing girl, Delma, screamed.

"You, Snow Grimes! You wanted my girls to peddle your filthy dope! You told me if they didn't, you would ruin the show! Now you—"

Snow Grimes ripped out a mean epithet. The lithe movement of the girl in the many mirrors was bewildering. The mobleader could see a dozen dancing girls. All were scooping revolvers from the floor from beside fallen bodies of a dozen Quick Triggers.

Snow Grimes squeezed the chopper trigger. This time he made a mistake.

Only glass crashed and fell in long splinters to the floor. But from the hands of a dozen Delmas in the mirrors, smoky flame belched from the muzzle of Quick Trigger's dropped revolver.

Delma made no mistake. Snow Grimes stood with his mouth flopping open, a film coming over his eyes. His machine gun bounced from the floor and one hand groped for the top of his head. Most of his black, patent-leather hair was blasted off by that tearing, heavy caliber bullet.

Snow Grimes went down to stay, as his mobsters cursed and jammed forward with guns flaming at the dozen reflected images of Delma. The Whisperer had gained the control room door. In a few words, Delma, the dancing girl had cleared up one bad angle of the Crazyland case, her contacts with Snow Grimes.

The mobster had been attempting to have the dancing girls sell narcotics. That would have been a nice setup. That had been what Delma had meant when The Whisperer had seen her cry out, "No! No! You can't do that!"

Two score maddened killers lurched into the first passage. But by some miracle of chance, Delma had slipped out of all the mirrors. There was only the wounded Quick Trigger. The mobsters were pouring upon him.

Then The Whisperer was pulling the lever of a control. The body of Quick Trigger vanished. The mirrors had been switched. Instead, the mobsters saw The Whisperer himself walking calmly toward them, blood trickling from a wound in his head. They were sure they saw him. So sure they surged forward, a dozen rods crackling.

FROM behind them chattered the chopper that Snow Grimes had let fall from his dead hands. Its slugs mowed down half a dozen of the killers before they could turn. As they swung around, The Whisperer disappeared from the mirror in which they had seen his reflection.

Instead of mirrored walls, all abruptly turned black and blank. The mobsters made a big mistake. Surround The Whisperer, was an order given by one. The killers divided, seeking side passages which might lead them to the hiding places of The Whisperer and the fugitives.

The Whisperer dropped the chopper he had used. He was back in the control room. New mirrors, curved of surface, distorting all figures, swung into the wall. There was instant bedlam.

Each of the three groups of mobsters saw vague shadows dashing upon them. Machine guns and rods blazed and the Crystal Maze became a hideous bedlam of death, filled with roaring gunfire and the screams of dying men.

The Whisperer hung onto the controls. It would be no longer necessary for Sergeant Thorsen's men to mop up the gang. Instead of reflected shadows, the mobsters had been pouring bullets into each other.

Blood flowed in rivulets along polished surfaces of glass. Sergeant Thorsen and the loyal detectives were now bursting in. They heard the crisp voice of Wildcat Gordon.

"Pick up the pieces, boys! Perhaps some are alive to talk! Drag them out!"

In a side passage, The Whisperer was supporting his sagging body, changing back to the role of commissioner. He staunched the blood of two bullet wounds. In spite of his dizzy sensation, he managed to get a red carnation into his coat lapel and a flaming red necktie under his shirt collar.

So it was Wildcat Gordon in person who led Sergeant Thorsen and the others to old Quick Trigger, Delma, the Latina brothers and the midgets.

"Now we're going places!" snapped Wildcat.

CHAPTER XVI
FIVER FABIAN'S GHOST

RUBBER shrieked on a car stopping before Fiver Fabian's office in Crazyland. Deputy Henry Bolton, Mayor Van Royston and Attorney Meldrum got out. They saw the giant Fiver Fabian with Colonel Hammell beside him. There had been a final crashing of muffled shots.

"There's been hell to pay in the Crystal Maze!" boomed Fiver Fabian. "I believe some of your police got The Whisperer an' his mob in there! I was comin' back to call for your reserves!"

"It's terrible, terrible," said Colonel Hammell. "To think I should have lived to see the show business come to this kind of murder racket. Call more police, Fabian. These killers must be cleaned up."

Deputy Bolton was swearing fiercely. He used a piercing whistle. Other cars of coppers were coming in.

"I was afraid of this, so I am prepared!" said the deputy.

Attorney Meldrum took Colonel Hammell's arm.

"Come, colonel, and you, Mayor Van Royston, we'll be safer in Fabian's office," said Meldrum.

"Yes! Come in!" boomed Fiver Fabian, his tall figure turning into his office doorway. "The police will take care of things! We've had to decide to close the shows!"

Deputy Bolton was deploying new squads for swift approach upon the Crystal Maze. But the shooting had died out.

Then a man cried out. It was a hoarse, nerve-shattering cry. The huge figure of Fabian, with his tightly curled light hair, was standing in the doorway of his office. The cry had come from his lips. The back of one hand was being rubbed across his eyes.

Fabian was attempting to steady himself after that outcry. Meldrum caught the man's arm, pushed inside. There Meldrum stood transfixed. Mayor Van Royston and Colonel Hammell strode in beside them.

AT that instant, none of the four men could find speech in their tightened throats. Horror there had been, but none such as this. This final gesture of a fiendish brain, as it must have seemed at the minute to Mayor Van Royston, who turned white and collapsed weakly into a chair, covering his eyes.

The oaths from Colonel Hammell's lips were only husky whispers in his throat. Fiver Fabian's face seemed to be shrinking, growing haggard. Attorney Meldrum licked his mellow lips with a dry tongue.

Lallie, the hanged midget, stood on Fiver Fabian's desk. Stood with her stiff body leaning horribly, grotesquely upright against the wall. A thick rope was around her snow-white throat, one dangling end showing where it had been cut.

The doll-like midget's eyes were closed as peacefully as if she were only sleeping. Only the tiny legs were so terribly rigid, the small arms sticking out like those of a posed sawdust doll.

For half a minute, it was like that. Then it was Meldrum's voice that broke.

"Get her out of here! Out of here, you understand? Only a devil from hell could have—"

Fiver Fabian shook his huge body. He moved. Color was coming back into his face. His big hands reached as he stumbled across the office.

"I'll take her—"

An edged voice cut off his speech. "Don't touch her, Fabian! Lallie, tell him not to touch you!"

The stiff, white lips of the tiny midget moved obediently.

"Don't touch me, Fiver Fabian," she said, in her thin, little voice. "I was banged once, and that is enough. Don't any one touch me."

Like some doll moving on spring machinery, the hanged midget's stiff legs moved, automatically, awfully. With the rope dangling from her white neck, she walked straight toward Fiver Fabian.

The giant Fabian screamed. A hoarse, bull-like scream of terror. His big body whirled.

"Let me out of here! Out of my way!"

The booming words followed his scream. Fabian was pulling an automatic pistol from his shirt. He reached the door. A hammering fist shot straight into his big, round face. Another fist battered him back, and steel fingers clamped on his gun wrist.

"Sit down, Fabian!" commanded Wildcat Gordon. "Sit down and take it, like the murderous killer you are! Tell them about it, Lallie!"

LALLIE, the midget, opened her bright blue eyes. She was like a little doll. A small figure darted in, climbed to the desk beside her. The gallant Major Peppin supported his wife's tiny body.

"Fiver Fabian hanged me in the Haunted Cave," chanted Lallie. "But the whispering man cut me down and took me away. He brought me to my husband and the other midgets. Then he sent us to this Mister Wildcat Gordon with the funny clothes. I was almost made dead by Fiver Fabian, but the whispering man was good to me."

Fabian was muttering hoarsely, "It ain't true! That's all a lie! I know nothing about—"

"It's the truth!" snapped Wildcat. "You forgot a few things when you tried to hang Lallie, Fabian! A midget doesn't hang as easily as a normal human being. There's the difference in weight for one thing. Her body wouldn't drag as much as an ordinary person.

"Also, in her efforts to free herself, Lallie managed to clamp one hand on the rope above her neck and tried to pull herself up, relieving the strain on her neck. She succeeded in getting the rope twisted into some sort of knot around that hand and thus relieved the pull.

"When The Whisperer rescued her—as she claims—she was not dead, *but unconscious!* Fortunately, that knot slipped little by little, and she was rescued before the rope had completed its job."

"It's a frame-up!" blurted Fabian. "She's crazy! I never did anythin' to harm anyone—"

"How about setting a time bomb at the end of a rope at Colonel Hammell's home?" demanded Wildcat. "Then there was something about mud on Jalo Latina's clothes, too. And how about calling the colonel from his room when you knew the bomb would explode? You wanted to put the blame on Latina, at least pin one crime on him!"

"No! No!" raged Fabian. "That's crazy! I didn't—"

"Didn't you forge the letter of extortion supposed to be from Delma to Colonel Hammell?" Wildcat went on ironically. "You don't know the joke of those two items, Fabian. It was not Delma's writing or her signature on her pictures, but that of a woman where the pictures were printed! A very, very bad mistake, Fabian! Also, you should never clean your fingernails in public."

"I don't know what you're talkin' about! What's that—"

"Our laboratory got the same earth from your nail file that came from Jalo Latina's clothes, from the mud in Colonel Hammell's yard. Jalo was with Delma when the bomb exploded, but that would have been a poor alibi without this other. Put the steel on him, Sergeant Thorsen."

As the bracelets snapped on Fabian's wrists, Attorney Meldrum was rising, easing himself toward the door.

"JUST a minute, Meldrum!" rapped out Wildcat. "As a lawyer you will appreciate this. The day the chimpanzee killed the midget, I found some of the chimp's hairs on Fabian's coat sleeve. He was the one who opened the cage, let the chimp loose and used the dictaphone to play the murder music."

Deputy Henry Bolton never was satisfied. He had been staring at Delma, the dancing girl.

"But, Commissioner Gordon, this girl is guilty as hell of shooting Rocco Latina, and here she is!" he said harshly. "I don't get—"

"Many things!" stated Wildcat. "In the first place, Fabian once was a ventriloquist in the show. He could imitate any voice. It was his voice you heard when the diver was shot. It was Fabian who stole Delma's pistol from her hotel, murdered with it, then put it in her dressing room!"

"You'd have to prove that, Commissioner Gordon!" said Mayor Van Royston. "Some of this sounds like a lot of guessing!"

"Tiny Traeger was the wild girl and she saw Fabian put the pistol among Delma's clothes," stated Wildcat. "I heard Fabian mimic another woman's voice, that of Charmon, the snake girl, who happens to be his own wife."

Colonel Hammell's gray head was bowed.

"It seems impossible," he said slowly. "Why should Fabian, whom I have trusted for years, do such fiendish things to us?"

The mellow, smooth voice of Attorney Meldrum spoke.

"In all this there seems no motive, only circumstantial evidence, Commissioner Gordon," he said. "I shall personally assume the defense of Mr. Fabian. It will take more than the bits of scanty evidence gathered here and there. I am going home to prepare a case that will—"

"You're sitting in that chair!" grated Wildcat Gordon, one hand slaming the bulky figure of the

lawyer down. "Motive, hell! You know the motive! You furnished it, and you were intending to split with Fabian after the hired Snow Grimes mob and Fabian's own murders had cleared out the three Latinas, Delma and the midgets. You know why Fabian was out to discredit or kill all of them! You and Fabian having yourselves tied up at my place by your own mobsters is old stuff, Meldrum!"

The attorney attempted to arise. Sergeant Thorsen clicked handcuffs on his wrists. Colonel Hammell was staring at his lawyer.

"You told Fabian, Meldrum?" he said. "You violated my confidence? Then you are—"

"He is just as much in these murders as Fabian," said Wildcat. "And he'll burn at the same time. Yes, Colonel Hammell, when you made a will dividing your ten-million-dollar Crazyland equally between the three Latina boys, Delma and your midget troupe, and your manager, Fiver Fabian, you turned loose a beast. Meldrum imparted the word of that will to Fabian."

"You mean, Commissioner Gordon that—"

"Fabian and Meldrum plotted together to drive the other heirs—your own loyal people—from the shows. Failing in that, they tried murder. The Snow Grimes outfit was working for them, to be paid out of what their racket and extortion activities might bring. I believe that about covers the situation, Colonel Hammell. Sergeant Thorsen, you can put these two nice boys away."

Mayor Van Royston straightened himself pompously.

"We have a police department second to none," he stated. "But, Commissioner Gordon, this Whisperer helped in these crimes. He must be apprehended!"

The china-blue eyes of Lallie, the little midget woman, blazed.

"Don't any of you ever dare touch my nice, whispering man who saved my life!" shrilled her thin, sweet voice.

"Anyone who does will have to answer to me!" proclaimed her tiny husband, Major Peppin, expanding his small chest. "Just let me hear of it, that's all!"

The gallant, little showman, Major Peppin meant every word of it.

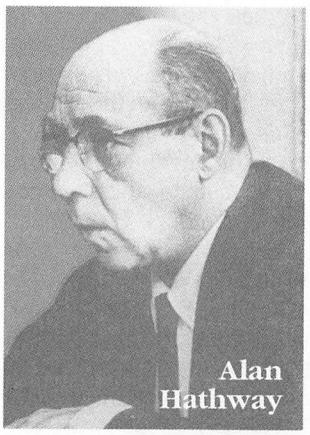
THE END

Laurence Donovan

The Street & Smith house name "Clifford Goodrich" masked the identities of writers Laurence Donovan and Alan Hathway.

One of the most prolific wordsmiths of the pulp era, Laurence Donovan (1885-1950) pounded out thrillers for a variety of magazines including *Argosy, The Shadow, The Phantom Detective, Black Book Detective, Zeppelin Stories* and *The Skipper,* along with the original 14-issue run of *The Whisperer*. The former journalist wrote almost the entire debut issue of Street & Smith's *Movie Action*, and in 1935 was recruited to alternate with Lester Dent as "Kenneth Robeson" on *Doc Savage*. The following year, he was assigned to develop Street & Smith's new hero pulp series, *The Skipper* (as "Wallace Brooker") and *The Whisperer*. In 1938, Donovan moved to Standard Magazines where he ghosted lead novels for *The Phantom Detective* (under the "Robert Wallace" house name), *G-Man*'s Dan Fowler, the Masked Detective and the Black Bat.

Alan Hathway (1906-1977) was a legendary American newspaperman. Born in Chicago and raised in Michigan, Hathway worked for the Chicago City News Bureau and the Chicago *Herald-Examiner* before moving to Manhattan in the 1920s and joining the staff of the New York *Daily News*. He began writing short fiction for Street & Smith in 1936, ghosted four Doc Savage novels and took over The Whisperer series when Donovan departed, writing most of the shorts in *The Shadow* and all the lead novels in the 1940-42 revival of *The Whisperer* magazine. In 1944, Hathway succeeded fellow Doc Savage ghost Harold A. Davis as managing editor of *Newsday.* Under his management, the Long Island newspaper was awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 1954 for its investigative reporting on labor racketeering. Hathway retired as executive editor in 1967 to make way for the paper's new publisher, former White House press secretary Bill Moyers.


Alan Hathway

By Clifford Goodrich

CRAGS OF DEATH

No linguist was The Whisperer—and what he did with "pig latin" made history!

"DROPPER" KRANTZ threw the looped rope to the top of the prison wall. The loop caught. Cautiously, Dropper hauled himself up, sneered in triumph.

At that instant, a guard emerged from a tower booth.

Dropper twisted, pawed the smuggled automatic from his pocket. It spewed flame and lead. The guard's face became a grimace of pain, of unbelief. He collapsed on the wall.

Dropper Krantz leaped to the ground outside and raced toward a waiting sedan.

"Quick!" he moaned. "They'll be after us in a second, Steve! Scram!"

The driver of the car was shrouded in the gloom. He laughed harshly.

Popff!

There was a single red stab of flame from a silenced gun. Dropper Krantz's jaw sagged. He slumped to the ground.

Dropper had "escaped" into an oblivion from which he would not return.

Whatever it was that Dropper had threatened to tell if his pals did not free him, was sealed by death.

The police had sweated Dropper to make him talk—to force him to tell why he had kidnapped a man who had no money, one who had neither job nor relatives; a man with no criminal record. But Dropper would not talk. He became terrified, insisted he did not know. His crime did not seem to make any sense.

But there had been no sense, either, in the mysterious kidnappings of other unimportant men in recent months. Many had simply disappeared.

Only three had returned—three who convinced police that something horrible lay behind the strange disappearances. They were no longer men, these three. They were glassy-eyed creatures, shells of flesh without will or memory.

The driver named Steve laughed again. He talked to himself as he slid the car into gear. His voice was a silky sneer.

"They won't find out," he muttered. "They'll never find out, now! No more will get away."

Then Steve paused. He listened for the screech of the prison escape alarm. He heard it. But first he heard something else—a weird challenge in the night. He told himself it was imagination. But he shuddered.

The sound was an eerie, whispering chuckle. It was something ghostly, as if the night itself had spoken. The executioner of Dropper Krantz was not alone. The sedan had a passenger. A gray, wispy figure clung to the trunk rack in the rear!

The Whisperer—the gray, wispy figure—also was thinking of those glassy-eyed men who had no memories. The gray marauder of the underworld, the "supercrook" who terrified crooks, themselves, had caused the stage to be set for the escape of Dropper Krantz.

No one knew that The Whisperer had been the director behind the scenes. But the gray man wanted to find out who was behind Dropper, and why.

The driver, Steve, knew the gun had been smuggled into Dropper. He did not know it had been intercepted, reloaded with harmless blanks. Nor did he know that the prison guards had been rehearsed carefully.

THE WHISPERER repressed an eerie chuckle. He lay, spread-eagled, on the steel top of the sedan. He had crawled there from the trunk rack.

Narrow were the gray man's eyes. He knew who the driver was. He was Steven Drosner, secretary to Doctor Varney Melchoir, the scientist. Drosner was something of a scientist himself.

The Whisperer thought of Melchoir as the sedan raced into the wild country in back of the city. The terrain was uneven, craggy. Oil wells pounded in the distance. There was an oppressing smell of gas in the air.

Doctor Melchoir split the atom. He delved into temperatures of zero absolute; learned new things about invisible light. He dabbled in poisons and performed queer experiments on animals He encouraged no visitors to his strange establishment. Drosner was his only employee, aside from a blind laboratory attendant.

Hunters had been chased from the rambling, craggy estate he rented. Some had even been shot at. They didn't go there anymore. They whispered of strange experiments, of queer noises in the night. They told of peculiar-smelling gases that drifted up from fissures.

Melchoir's neighbors had complained about him, had hinted of terrible things he was doing. A committee of them had told it all to Estes Ensenta, the philanthropist who owned the old estate. Ensenta had made millions in South American oil. He spent much on philanthropy, slum clearance and on science. He rented the estate to Melchoir cheaply.

The Latin had been highly indignant. He called in police, demanded that they investigate Melchoir thoroughly, that they inspect the house he used as his laboratory.

Complying, the police had been pleased to report that Ensenta's fears were without foundation. But The Whisperer was not so sure. He thought of the glassy-eyed men who had been kidnapped, of the witless giant in the sedan on which he rode.

Until tonight, the gray man had no reason to connect Doctor Varney Melchoir with the crime of the kidnapper, Krantz. And now he had little time for contemplation of his reasons.

The sedan roared into the big estate. It bounced along a gravel drive. Suddenly the brakes screamed; Steven Drosner cursed, twisted the wheel.

The car lurched drunkenly, slammed to a stop. The gray man had a brief glimpse of a queer tableau in the driveway. A man and a girl were running. The girl was a pint-sized beauty. The wind pressed her dress around slim, graceful curves. Her eyes were wide, dark and staring.

She was Karla Melchoir, daughter of the scientist. She ran, panting for breath. Close behind her raced Melchoir himself. He was a small man, with black, snapping eyes and a ridiculous spade beard. His clothes looked as if he had never taken them off.

Both of them stopped as Steve ground the car to a halt. Steve cursed and the girl shrank back toward her father. Melchoir's face was inscrutable behind his black heard.

The Whisperer slipped quietly from his perch on top of the sedan. Queer-looking automatics appeared in his hands. The pale eyes flickered strangely.

Then a thousand Roman candles burst in his

brain. There was a thud, as some blunt instrument crashed against his skull. The aurora borealis seemed to spread itself before his eyes. He stumbled. Then everything went black.

"I've got him, men!" the nasal voice squalled. "Help! Help! It's the—"

The Whisperer became fully conscious then. He realized at once that Varney Melchoir's estate was loaded with policemen. The nasal voice belonged to one who particularly yearned to catch The Whisperer.

Deputy Commissioner Henry Bolton desired only two things in life. One was to arrest The Whisperer. The other was to grab James "Wildcat" Gordon's job as police commissioner. He had an idea that either one would lead to both.

The Whisperer lunged, one compact fist snaking out like the tip of a bullwhip. Bolton's eyes went glassy.

Softly the gray man chuckled, flicked on a tiny flashlight. He turned it straight on a second cop—a gaunt, hawk-nosed man with a skull as bald as a gatepost, save two tufts of hair over his ears.

"Shut off the light, you danged fool!" retired Deputy Richard Traeger growled. "The place is lousy with cops!"

Richard Traeger, better known as old "Quick Trigger," was the only man alive who knew that the dreaded Whisperer was Wildcat Gordon in disguise. His reason for knowing was rather simple. A master at makeup, he had manufactured the dental plates which gave The Whisperer his eerie, chilling voice and the oddly pointed chin.

The Whisperer did not move. He spoke in quick, whispered tones.

"Who called the cops?" he demanded. "What do they think they're looking for?"

Quick Trigger squinted at the gray man.

"Melchoir phoned," the bald deputy explained. "He said something about his daughter being missing. Said he was afraid to talk. Then—"

Quick Trigger paused, scratched his bald dome. His gaunt face looked perplexed.

"He said he'd leave a message, Wildcat," Quick mumbled. "Then he got all excited and said to never mind it. Said he'd changed his mind. It don't make sense! Maybe it wasn't really Melchoir at all."

The Whisperer chuckled softly.

"There are a lot of things that don't make sense," he hissed. "Get the cops into the house, if you can. The Whisperer has things to do."

He issued certain instructions to Quick Trigger. The old deputy groaned, and shook his head. He was certain that the disguise of his own creation would some day get Wildcat into a jam that he could not escape from. But he also knew it was useless to argue.

THE WHISPERER drifted silently into the darkness. He passed a vague shadow that he knew was the ruins of the ancient stables. They had long been abandoned.

Moving on, the gray man dodged fissures in the ground. Wisps of vapor rose from some of them. The smell of gas was stronger here than in the nearby oil fields. The Whisperer's arms brushed a tall plant. It scratched him.

Quickly, the gray man whipped out his tiny flash, cupped it in his hand. He saw a cactus plant. It was an odd type of desert tuber. He recognized it as one found only in certain parts of Central America.

The ghostly, chilling whisper drifted into the night. Then the gray man went quickly toward the main house. He had discovered one link in the chain he sought—a link he thought would lead to horror.

He approached the house from the rear. Many voices came from the front part of the rambling structure. Quick Trigger was lining up the members of the household. That had been part of The Whisperer's instructions: to get them into the front rooms of the place.

The Whisperer took a thin instrument of tooled steel from a pocket. He inserted it in the crack of a casement window, worked it toward the latch. The window gave.

In another instant, the gray man was in a huge, vault-like room. Wildcat Gordon had been here before. It was Varney Melchoir's laboratory.

The Whisperer heard a door open. Stealthy footsteps moved across the floor. The gray man flicked on his flashlight. A form in Khaki clothing moved softly. The man paid no attention to the light. He did not see it. The man was Sam Hosden, Melchoir's only employee except Steven Drosner.

Hosden was blind, had been since birth. His other senses were developed far beyond those of other men. He could straighten up the laboratory, perform household duties, without the aid of eyes. Melchoir claimed he employed him because he had known him since boyhood, and because Melchoir was interested in cures for blindness.

Sam Hosden moved toward a bulky library of queer-looking books. They were in Braille. The blind man carried one volume in his hands. He paused furtively.

Holding his breath, The Whisperer stood motionless.

Stealthily, Hosden secreted the book of Braille behind the others in the front row of a shelf. Then he padded out of the room.

The Whisperer turned on a dim table lamp, moved quickly to the bookshelf. He took the same volume from its hiding place, opened it. The raised

dots of Braille showed no more than watermarks on the heavy paper.

Shutting his eyes, the gray man ran sensitive fingers over the raised dots. The sensory perception of the fingers could grasp those words more quickly than could the eye. Even to a man with sight. Just as a telegrapher can translate the sound of code more quickly than his eyes can interpret the printed dots and dashes.

The Whisperer's fingers flew. They told him nothing. The book was merely a novel. But as his fingers raced over the dotted lines, he suddenly knew he was being watched. There was a vague rustle behind draperies that hid a doorway.

Quickly, the gray man whirled to the bookcase. Then he moved toward the door of the room. The light went out.

Four figures struck him simultaneously. A knife slashed at his coat. The Whisperer fell, squirmed. The Braille volume was torn from his grasp; feet pounded out of the door.

VOICES began to yell. The Whisperer's name was screamed into the darkness. Other voices answered, converged upon the room. The Whisperer slipped out a window.

The Braille book had told him nothing. But he knew that it was important. Important enough for Hosden to hide. And important enough for others to take from The Whisperer.

The gray man moved rapidly. He shucked clothing from his body, hurled it under a bush. From one pocket he pulled a folded Army campaign hat. It was of the type of felt that does not wrinkle.

From his mouth came the dental plates. His jaw became as square and hard as the end of a railroad tie. He brushed whitish powder from his hair.

Then he began to yell.

The voice was no hissing, chilling whisper. It was a sharp, staccato bark that brought instant notice. Wildcat Gordon had a voice that made cops or Army sergeants snap to attention.

"That Whisperer's out here somewhere!" he shouted somewhat truthfully. "What's going on here?"

Lights flashed on in the laboratory. Wildcat pounded across the lawn, climbed into the window. The suit he wore almost blinded the people who were congregating there. It had a checkered pattern that could have been used to flag a train.

Quick Trigger was in the room. Wildcat recognized a thin, forceful man with him as Estes Ensenta, the philanthropist. Ensenta was a small, compact dynamo of a man. He moved and spoke with the energy that was characteristic of him. The thin cigar he smoked was just as characteristic. He was never without one.

Right now, he was very angry. He yelled at Steven Drosner, who stood beside him.

"Dammit, Drosner," he rapped, "these things cannot go on! Get Melchoir, wherever he is. If there's anything wrong about this place, I'm going to drag it out! The whole place must be searched!"

Drosner cringed before Ensenta's rage. He looked uncertainly at the owner of the estate, then he slunk toward a door.

"All right," he muttered. "I'll get him."

Leaving the room, he almost collided with the shapely form of Karla Melchoir. The girl recoiled from him. Her eyes were wide with fear. One hand went quickly to her mouth when she saw Commissioner Wildcat Gordon.

She knew of his reputation for catching crooks; knew, as did most of the city, that he relentlessly pushed a hunt until his catch was landed. Except, of course, when the cops were tracking down The Whisperer.

Wildcat eyed her sharply.

"I understand you have been missing," he barked. "Where were you?"

The girl blanched. She stammered, faltered with indecision.

"I—I just went for a walk," she managed. "I—"

The hallway door snapped open, and a man strode in.

"Melchoir!" Estes Ensenta snapped. "What's this all about?"

The spade-bearded man did not speak at first. His beady, black eyes surveyed the people in the room.

"Nothing is amiss," he said, sibilantly. "My daughter merely went for a stroll. I became needlessly worried."

He spread his hands in a gesture of apology, smiled upon the girl.

Her eyes seemed to grow afresh with terror. She shrank away, trembling. But her mouth grew firm with decision.

"It is so," she said, softly. "Everything is as it should be."

AT that moment, Henry Bolton crowded into the room with a squad of cops.

"We've searched every foot of this place," he grumbled. "There isn't a thing wrong that we can find."

Without explanation, Wildcat swung on Estes Ensenta. His eyes were as hard, as pale, as blue marbles.

"If there is anything wrong, Ensenta," he rapped, "I'll hold you responsible! After all, you own this place."

Estes Ensenta exploded. His wrath reached the ceiling, flowed out of the windows. The thin cigar bobbled as he raged.

"Hold me!" he screamed. "Why, if that's the case, I'll throw this Melchoir out tomorrow! I'm practically giving the place to him, as a gesture in the interest of science. Why, I—-"

He seemed on the verge of an apoplectic stroke. Bolton rushed forward. His face seemed nearly as apoplectic as Ensenta's.

"You're crazy, Wildcat!" he whined. "Why, Mr. Ensenta has done more for this city than any other man in years. Why, the mayor—"

But Wildcat was not watching Bolton. Nor Ensenta. He stared intently at the pretty features of Karla Melchoir. He saw two emotions cross her face. The first was fear, more acute fear than ever. Then came relief. But even that was brief. Wildcat tried to add the two together in their proper time and sequence.

"We will leave," Wildcat snapped. "Nothing is to be accomplished now."

Everybody left the laboratory. That is, all except one man. Wildcat noticed that blind Sam Hosden hung behind. Wildcat went out of the room, tarried for a moment. Then he spun on his heel, raced back to the laboratory.

Sam Hosden was on his knees before the Braille bookcase. He turned at the sound of Wildcat's entry. His face blanched. Wildcat walked swiftly to him.

"What is it, Hosden?" he snapped. "What are you looking for?"

Hosden's face became inscrutable.

"Nothing," he said, flatly. "I'm not looking for anything. I don't know anything."

There was finality in his tone.

WILDCAT GORDON went out with his men. He was certain of one thing. Whether or not there had been a message in that book in Braille, Sam Hosden had believed there was. Wildcat wondered if Hosden was right. The Whisperer's sensitive fingers had been unable to find it.

The police coupe in which Wildcat was supposed to be riding roared out of the driveway. Quick Trigger was at the wheel. But Wildcat Gordon was not in the car. Wildcat's quick hands found the gray bundle of clothing he had left under the bush outside the laboratory window. Quickly, he became again The Whisperer.

The gray man knew ugly plans were being enacted on Melchoir's estate. But The Whisperer had his own reasons for not having forced a showdown.

He crept once again into the weird house. He did not retrace his steps to the laboratory. A cellar door yielded to his tool-steel jimmy. Softly, he went down a dim, vaulted corridor.

The vaulted corridor was dimly lighted. The house above was strangely quiet. But there was a sound. It was a motion more than a noise. A strange pounding came to The Whisperer's senses. It seemed to come from no central point.

Then another, grating noise made itself heard ahead of him. A panel slid back in the masonry wall. A black automatic poked its nose out first. Then he saw the face of Karla Melchoir.

At the same instant, the girl saw The Whisperer. She screamed. Then she blasted with the gun. Lead ripped through the clothing of the gray man. He dodged, flattened himself against the wall.

The girl was too excited to aim properly. That was all that saved the life of The Whisperer. He did not shoot at the girl. Suddenly, she screamed anew. There was terror in her cry.

She hurled down her automatic, fled through the sliding panel she had used to enter the corridor. Instinctively, The Whisperer whirled. His eerie chuckle floated through the fingerlike corridor of the cellar.

A dozen men were advancing toward him. Their faces were expressionless, their eyes flat and glassy. They grinned without mirth, came forward with a grim relentlessness.

THE WHISPERER backed. These men were not blind. But neither could they see. They were like the three kidnapped men who had returned; like the giant who had seized him by the throat from the speeding sedan.

Behind them, a bearded figure capered.

"They work for

Melchoir!" the spade-bearded man screamed. "They do as I direct them. Seize the gray man!"

Quickly, The Whisperer brought up his peculiar-looking, silenced automatics. The scientist dodged behind a protruding ledge of stone. The gray man hesitated to shoot. He knew these men were not responsible for what they were doing. But he knew that he would die if he did not stop them.

Carefully, he aimed for their legs.

But The Whisperer had been too engrossed to realize that other dead-eyed automatons were moving up behind him. The Whisperer quickly was clamped tight in their arms. Another slugged The Whisperer slowly into unconsciousness.

As his brain whirled dizzily, the gray man thought of the book in Braille. The spectacle of these unseeing men told him something about that book.

WHEN The Whisperer regained consciousness, in a small chamber, he was tightly bound. One small door led into the room. It was fitted with heavy clamps, rubber-lipped edges. It looked not unlike an access trap to a high-pressure boiler. Series of pipes lined the walls.

Two men stood at one side of the chamber. One was the bearded captor; the other was blind Sam Hosden.

"I cannot find the Braille volume," Hosden complained. "But I do not think it matters. I could find no message in it. There probably isn't any."

Hosden stopped, went out. The scientist whirled toward his captive, grinned evilly.

"Whatever you have learned, my friend, it will do you little good," he purred.

The gray man nodded.

"I learned about these automatons," he whispered. "I knew what had robbed them of their wills, when I found the cactus planted up above."

"True," the scientist agreed. "It is a cactus found only in Central America. For centuries, the Indians there have known how to brew brain-deadening draughts from certain cacti. And it leaves no trace."

Grimly, The Whisperer smiled. He knew there must be some reason for those automatons—some heavy work that must be done by men who would not remember, could not talk about their tasks. The gray man noticed the peculiar equipment of the room, and thought of Varney Melchoir's experiments in the temperatures of absolute zero. He thought of the terrain about the estate and believed he knew the answer.

The bearded man smiled cruelly. His black eyes glittered, as if he read The Whisperer's thoughts.

"What I use them for is my affair," he purred. "You will not be with us long!"

He looked at his watch.

"You will be frozen!" he rasped. "This high-compression regenerative refrigeration chamber will do it so quickly there will be no destruction of the body tissues. Later, when your corpse is found, there will be no indication of the cause of death. It will appear natural, a heart failure."

The little man's eyes seemed to dance. Frost began to appear on the pipes. The drop in temperature was sharp, abrupt.

"I can freeze anything!" he fairly screamed. "I can liquefy air, freeze it! I freeze oxygen, hydrogen, even—"

His excitement took him off his guard. The Whisperer moved wrists that he always kept greased. Long practice made his supple hands double-jointed. They took no more space than the wrists.

In one twist, his hands were free. He doubled his legs under him, straightened them, then plunged like a projectile at the bearded man, bowled him over.

Before the scientist could recover, The Whisperer had his feet untied. He plunged again at the bearded man. The other screamed, twisted suddenly. He darted through the traplike door, plunged down the corridor.

But his flight was hasty. He tripped, plunged into a jagged, jutting rock. The skull shattered; blood spurted from his head as he fell.

He lay there, staring wildly. His breath was going fast, but the sneer still flickered on his lips.

"Back! Back!" he muttered. "Do as I say or your friend dies! The old policeman has come to aid you. Even now, he is dying—"

The little man collapsed. There was no more breath in his body.

THE WHISPERER leaned quickly over, stared at the dead man's face. He seized the spade beard, jerked it sharply. The beard came off, bared the thin face of Steven Drosner.

Of the disguise, The Whisperer had been certain. It had explained to him why Karla Melchoir had been afraid, why she shrank from the man who was supposed to be her father when Ensenta had sent for him. In the driveway, when the lights of Drosner's car had revealed the two, she had not shrunk from Melchoir. She had gone toward him when the lights exposed him.

The gray man knew that the daughter had been the first captive, to constrain Melchoir from talking, from getting out of hand. But the old man had grown desperate, had called police.

Doctor Varney Melchoir did not fit into the picture The Whisperer had painted. Melchoir was not a man to have dealings with Dropper Krantz. Money never meant a thing to Melchoir. His life proved it. He lived only for science.

Men who had contacts with crooks like Dropper would be criminals wise in the ways of the under-

world. They would be men interested in big cash returns, not in the experiments that might be performed by some queer scientist.

The Whisperer raced down the corridor. He tried the sliding panel through which Karla Melchoir had entered the cellar. He wasted precious moments trying to find the labyrinth that he sought. He knew it must be near. And he thought he knew what was going on in that subterranean workroom.

Much evil work, in addition to the surmised deaths of Old Quick Trigger and both Melchoirs. For Quick had returned here, under instructions from The Whisperer.

The gray man raced from the cellar then. He could find nothing there. The walls seemed without a break, or hidden doors.

The Whisperer tore across the grounds to the windows of the laboratory. He leaped over a sill, glided to a huge overstuffed chair near the Braille bookcase. Beneath the cushion, he found a volume.

It was the one Sam Hosden had sought. The Whisperer had hidden it when the lights went out after he realized he was being watched. The book he had taken with him, the one wrested from him, was another.

The Whisperer opened the book quickly. He found the message on the title page. The dots of Braille were there. But they were not raised. No blind man's sensitive fingers could find them. They were dots of acid, as pale as watermarks. They were scarcely noticeable to a man with sight; meaningless to most. And a blind man could not feel them.

Staring, the gray man read. His eyes translated the Braille dots into words.

"Underneath the old stables, the third stall," he read. "If I am gone, save my daughter. If she returns and I have disappeared, Sam Hosden will reveal the existence of this message."

The Whisperer chuckled softly. Apparently, Melchoir had not told Hosden what the message was, nor how it had been inscribed. The scientist must have learned his old friend and employee was plotting against him, must have withheld the nature of the message.

ACROSS the craggy grounds ran the gray man. Wisps of gas drifted up from fissures. The stables were empty. Below them, the ground throbbed faintly.

The Whisperer found a trapdoor in the third horse stall. It was cunningly concealed. Another larger trap was beside a loading platform. Tire tracks of heavy trucks were there.

The Whisperer had no time to investigate. He leaped down the smaller trap. It led to a rocky passageway. Along the passage, he raced. The noise of pounding grew louder as he ran.

A girl's scream rose above it.

Suddenly, The Whisperer plunged into a yawning cavern. Bright lights glittered from the walls. There was a profusion of machinery. Giant tanks bore pressure-indicator dials. There was heavy work here for men who must never talk.

Karla Melchoir was bound to a straight-backed chair. Her father lay on the floor, tied hand and foot. Beside him was Quick Trigger.

Automaton men were all about the trio. In their midst, the dynamic figure of Estes Ensenta bounced. The ever-present cigar was clenched between his teeth.

"This one must die first," Ensenta exploded, pointing at Quick Trigger. "Then you both will go. The bald one says other police will come. They will find my secret now. But they shall not know my part!"

Suddenly, Ensenta jerked erect. The Whisperer hissed an eerie warning through the cavern. His super-silenced pistols had been taken from him. He had no gun.

Ensenta whirled, his eyes narrow. Cautiously, he stood behind the girl.

"Kill him!" he shouted to his dead-eyed servants. "Rush him! He must not get away!"

The Whisperer had no intention of fleeing. But he took the bait.

Quickly, he glided around huge chemical retorts, behind great electric motors. The smell of different gases drifted into his nostrils.

Glassy-eyed giants spread about the cavern. They all were armed. Their faces were vacant, grinning. But they would kill without a flicker of an eyelash.

Suddenly, Estes Ensenta used a force greater than sure death for The Whisperer. He seized Quick Trigger, shoved an automatic against his head.

"Come out, Whisperer!" he bellowed. "Surrender yourself within the count of ten, or I pull this trigger!"

He puffed fiercely on his cigar.

The Whisperer made a quick decision. He had no gun, but he did have weapons. He carried two powerful grenades for emergencies. He yelled quickly to old Quick Trigger, choosing the only language he could think of that Ensenta might not know. Ensenta was foreign-born, a good linguist.

The Whisperer used "pig latin."

Then he hurled his bombs. He threw them far down in the corridor, toward a row of compression tanks. They detonated with a roar. Gases rushed from the shattered tanks into the cavern.

IN that instant, Quick Trigger jerked his head aside. The gun roared. But the bullet plowed harmlessly into the wall of the cavern.

The Whisperer dived for Ensenta, knocked the gun from his hand. The master crook fled then. The combination of gases filled the cavern, made it foggy.

Ensenta knew the cavern well. It was also apparent that there was another exit, down past those shattered tanks.

Suddenly, The Whisperer sniffed. His eyes glowed queerly. He spoke rapidly to old Quick Trigger, cut his bonds. Then he freed the others, told them to run.

The gray man drifted into the fog-like gas. His hissing, eerie voice came from far down the cavern.

"Turn back, Ensenta, or I'll shoot!" the whispering voice challenged. "Go back while you yet have time!"

Ensenta laughed shrilly.

"I know my way out," he gritted. "I have made millions from Melchoir's helium! I go now to spend it!"

"I only warn you once," the gray man hissed. His voice was right beside the master crook.

Then the cavern exploded like a monstrous charge of powder. It was a sudden, raging inferno of flame and concussion. The blast shattered solid walls of rock. Thousands of dollars' worth of equipment shattered like torn tin foil.

The three fugitives struggled into the upper passageway. They were protected by a turn in the rocky corridor under the old stables.

But the explosion hurled them flat, swept them against the sharp crags of walls. Quick Trigger sat up uncertainly.

"W-what —" he began.

"Helium," Melchoir explained. "I have perfected an inexpensive method of liquefying it. It could be shipped without detection. The United States has the only natural supply of gases from which it can be obtained, and restricts its shipments rigidly.

"With my process, Ensenta made millions; would have made millions more. For wartime use, certain foreign governments would mortgage their entire currencies to get helium."

Quick Trigger sat erect.

"Helium don't explode," he muttered. "Any school boy knows that."

Melchoir shook his head.

"No," he said, "but higher temperature gases must be liquefied first, to bring helium down to the necessary pressure and temperature. Highly explosive hydrogen is one that must be used in quantity. The Whisperer smelled it after the bomb freed the gases. Ensenta's cigar did the rest."

Karla Melchoir sobbed, looked sorrowfully at Quick Trigger.

"Your friend," she said, softly—"The Whisperer. He was down there, too. I heard his voice."

Quick Trigger sniffed, looked over his shoulder.

"Good riddance!" he grumbled.

He didn't bother telling her that The Whisperer had used ventriloquism in an attempt to make Ensenta run the other way, to save the crook for trial. And Quick now saw Wildcat stamping up the corridor.

"What's going on here?" Wildcat snapped.

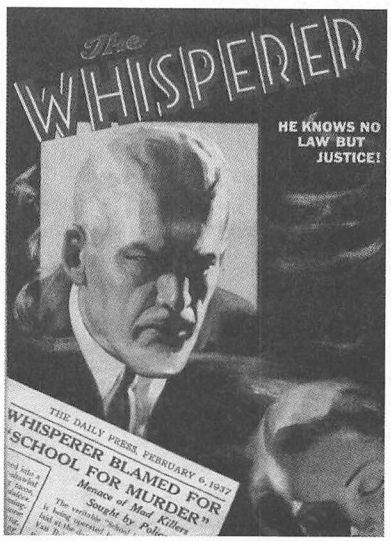
The girl sobbed again, pointed scornfully at Quick Trigger. Apparently, she had forgotten her own recent predicament.

"How can he be so ungrateful?" she cried. "He doesn't deserve to be saved!"

Quick Trigger blushed.

THE END

Coming in **THE WHISPERER #5:**



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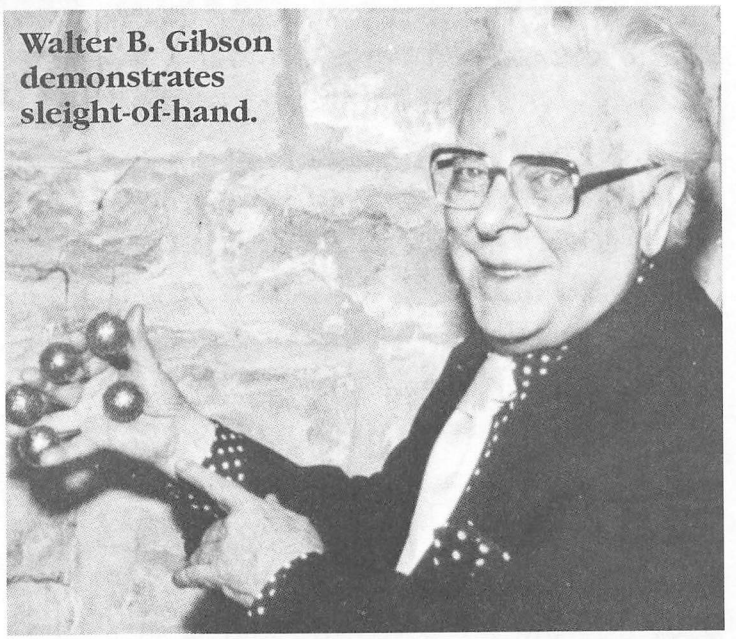


Walter B. Gibson demonstrates sleight-of-hand.

Writing as "Maxwell Grant," magician Walter B. Gibson developed The Shadow as a man of mystery "combining Houdini's penchant for escapes with the hypnotic power of Tibetan mystics, plus the knowledge shared by Thurston and Blackstone in the creation of illusions...." In 1937, the wordsmith delved even deeper into the world of stage magic when he launched a second series featuring the adventures of a "prestidigitective" in *Crime Busters*.

"I was called on for a magician story for the first issue," Gibson recalled in 1977, "so I gave my character the name of Norgil, which he formed by juggling the letters of his actual name, which was Loring. He could also change it to Ling Ro, a title which he used when called upon to perform wizardry in Chinese costume. Since The Shadow's popularity was at a peak and Street & Smith had earlier contracted to take my entire output of mystery fiction, I used my pen name of 'Maxwell Grant' with the Norgil stories as well, partly on the assumption that it would help the sale of *Crime Busters,* which it may have, for the new magazine sold well from the start."

Gibson performs the "Hindu Wands" illusion.

Gibson drew heavily upon his friends in the world of stage magic in developing the new series. "Norgil was modeled somewhat on an earlier Harry Blackstone, typical of the vaudeville acts. Miriam Lamond was a typical leading lady of the show." Gibson joined the Blackstone show in 1946, serving as press agent and even performing the show when the magician had multiple commitments.

"Norgil, himself, had so many prototypes that many of the stories suggested themselves automatically. Like Blackstone or Calvert, both headliners at the time, he could switch from fifty-minute shows in movie houses to a full evening extravaganza, with an enlarged company."

Gibson wrote 23 Norgil stories for *Crime Busters* and its successor, Street & Smith's *Mystery Magazine.* Though Norgil departed the pages of *Mystery* in 1940, he briefly returned in Gibson-scripted adventures in *Shadow Comics* and *Doc Savage Comics*.

Walter Gibson was far from finished with magician-detectives; he reimagined his friend Harry Blackstone as a magical sleuth in *Super Magician Comics* and the *Blackstone, the Magic Detective* radio series, and also scripted comic book adventures of Dr. Bill Neff for Street & Smith's *Red Dragon Comics* and *Ghost Breakers* and Charlton's *Racket Squad in Action.*

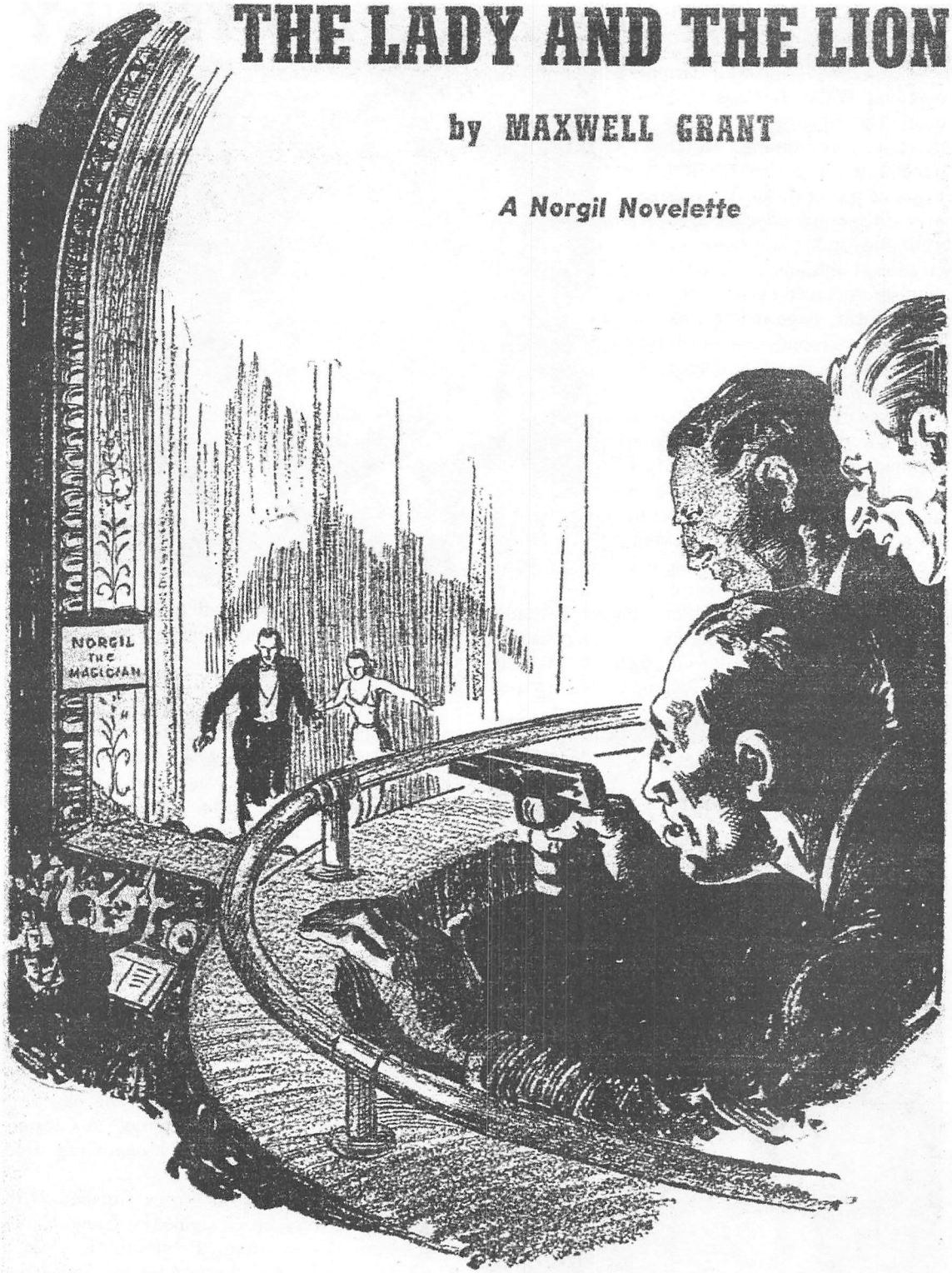
"The Lady and the Lion," the nineteenth Norgil tale, was first published in the January 1940 issue of *Mystery*.

—Anthony Tollin

THE LADY AND THE LION

by MAXWELL GRANT

A Norgil Novelette



CHAPTER I
THE SHOW GOES ON

THE six o'clock show had reached its climax. A packed audience was watching, breathless and agog, as curtains spread to disclose a full set stage, ready for the final illusion.

From the footlights, where he had finished a close-up paper-tearing trick, Norgil delivered a suave smile. Then, with a gesture toward the background, the magician announced:

"The lady and the lion!"

On one side of the stage stood a huge, curtained cabinet. Its platform was mounted high enough for

people to see completely beneath. The cabinet proper was seven feet high; when Norgil pulled the front curtain aside, he revealed a hollow interior, measuring ten feet square.

Politely, Norgil invited members of the audience to come onstage and inspect the cabinet. They arrived promptly, a dozen of them; after walking in and out of the curtained box, they were invited to take chairs near the wing of the stage.

Meanwhile, Norgil was appraising the entire audience. It was a packed house, something unusual for a supper show. Something that Norgil intended to mention to Belker, the theater manager, when they held a forthcoming argument.

For Norgil's thoughts were not entirely on the show. He was figuring how he could get his proper share of the profits that the Isis Theater had been making all week. There were some points on which Norgil and Belker did not agree; the time to thrash them out was coming very soon.

Music swelled from the orchestra; bells supplied a tinkle. It was the cue for the lady to step onstage. Snapping from his reverie, Norgil turned to introduce his charming assistant, Miss Miriam Lamond. The spectators become more intense than ever.

They had seen Miriam often during the show, in various costumes, but none so startling as this. Actually, the trappings were less daring than they looked. Miriam represented an exotic South Sea princess, so her costume was both scant and bejeweled.

Catching the spotlight, the spangles produced a dazzle, giving the impression that the South Sea lady was clad in jewels only.

Lightly, Miriam sprang into the large cabinet; stood in the very center, smiling at the audience, while Norgil drew the front curtain shut. Uniformed assistants were busy adjusting the other curtains along the top edge of the cabinet, which they reached by mounting wheeled steps which served as ladders.

Instructing the committee to watch the cabinet, Norgil crossed the stage to a square glass box that was suspended from the upright posts of a skeleton framework. There were roller blinds along the top edge of the frame; using the wheeled steps to reach them, the assistants drew the blinds downward, to hide the box.

At the center of the stage, Norgil waited impressively, while the music rose with terrific fervor. Smashing cymbals were competing with the bang of kettledrums, adding to the mad, pagan fanfare, when Norgil fired a revolver shot at the great cabinet.

Assistants tugged at ropes; draperies fell away in a flood. A roar answered the fading blare of the orchestra. The lady was gone; but that was trivial.

In her place was a pacing lion, shaggy-maned and powerful, that thrust its huge head against the barred door of a solid, full-sized cage that replaced the fallen curtains!

Committeemen leaped from their chairs, dashed down into the audience, urged to comical flights by Norgil's assistants. They didn't have to run, for Tongo, the lion, was a very friendly beast, despite his ferocious look. But it all helped in paving the way to the surprising sequel.

By the time the spectators were looking back at Norgil, they were really wondering what had happened to the lovely lady. Again, the magician fired his stage revolver, this time at the suspended box. Spring blinds shot upward; the missing brunette was revealed within the walls of glass!

Norgil helped the glittering lady out to the stage; they took two bows, as the curtains closed. Then, in response to the persistent applause that rolled in from the audience, Norgil stepped through the footlights and responded to the deafening outburst.

ALL was changed when the magician returned back through the curtains. The lights were dimmed; assistants had pushed the big cage, Tongo in it, back to a far corner. Miriam had put on slippers and kimono and was going upstairs to her dressing room.

Norgil's dressing room was closer, on a level with the stage, but he did not go there. Instead, he slid back a fireproof door, and took a side aisle, leading out past the boxes. The newsreel had begun, and the spectators were too interested in war scenes to note Norgil when he went by. But the magician was stopped by a pair of burly ushers when he reached the obscure door of the manager's office. Recognizing Norgil, they told him he could enter.

"Mr. Belker will be back in a few minutes," undertoned one. "But he's pretty particular about who we let go in."

"On account of the recent robberies," added the other. "Crooks have been pretty busy here in Westbury lately, and they're getting away with it."

Norgil went into the office, sat down and lighted one of his own cigars, instead of taking a very doubtful perfecto from the open box upon the manager's desk. If ever a man could be open-handed and tight-fisted at the same time, that man was Harvey Belker.

The manager of the Isis Theater was an actor in his own right. He could pose as a good fellow, while he figured ways to chisel. It was his inherent stinginess, however, that gave the game away. The cigars were a good example; Belker proffered them to people in grand style and didn't seem to realize that when the stogies curled, the smokers would recognize the cheapness of his gifts.

Another index to Belker's niggardly nature was the office itself. The carpet was frayed; the furniture battered. The safe in the corner was old and obsolete, which accounted for the ushers standing guard outside. In fact, the only new thing in the place was a large suitcase, that Norgil eyed with interest.

It was more than a suitcase; it was a portable strongbox. Its leather surface hid sides of steel, which Norgil tested, by rapping with his knuckles. The lock was modern, of the combination style. The camouflaged suitcase would be easy to steal, but it would be a troublesome thing to open.

Norgil's cigar was half finished when Belker entered. The theater manager was a bulky man, his big face mostly glower, except when he faked a smile, as he did when he saw Norgil.

"I hear you have some bills for me," remarked Norgil. "Let me see them, Belker."

The bulky man winced. News of his favorite practice must have leaked. His tone casual, he said that the bills covered minor items—repairs to the proscenium arch, where small holes had been drilled; beams for supporting a block and tackle used to haul the lion's cage; chairs rented for committee use.

"They don't amount to much," concluded Belker. "I'll simply deduct the total from your percentage, Norgil—"

"Let me see the bills."

Reluctantly, Belker produced them. They amounted to two hundred, fifty-eight dollars, and seventy-six cents.

Belker knew that an argument was due; he was on his feet to meet it, when Norgil calmly nodded.

"Quite reasonable," he purred. "Just stamp them 'paid' and sign them, Belker."

The theater manger fumed that the bills were legitimate, even though unexpected. He brought out Norgil's contract, insisted that it contained no clause making Belker responsible for what he termed unnecessary expenses.

"We did a good supper show," inserted Norgil, blandly. "There will be a packed house tonight, Belker, unless"—he paused, closed his eyes wearily, and rubbed his hand across his forehead—"you'd better read clause fourteen, Belker."

Reading the paragraph named, Belker found that the contract gave Norgil the right, in case of illness, to cancel any show at two hours' notice.

"You can't get away with this!" stormed Belker. "I'll prove you aren't ill! I'll bring in a physician—"

"And let him feel my pulse," suggested Norgil. "He will find that it has dropped away to nothing. An old Hindu trick, Belker, that fools every doctor who meets with it."

Fuming, the manager stalked the office; finally, he stopped at the desk, picked up a rubber stamp, and pounded the bills with it. Scrawling his initials under the "paid" marks, Belker flung the bills at Norgil, who pocketed them and stepped briskly to the door.

"Odd, how quickly that attack passed," remarked the magician. "I feel a lot better, Belker."

Then, with the door half open, Norgil gave the irate manager a parting smile, and added:

"The show goes on."

CHAPTER II
CLUES TO CRIME

BACK in his dressing room, Norgil found a visitor, a pleasant-faced, middle-aged man, with grayish hair. He introduced himself as Mervin Lorne, and the name brought a prompt nod from Norgil. Lorne was a local merchant, whose store ran large advertisements in the Westbury newspapers. He was also a stanch member of the local civic committee, which was doing its utmost to clean up the crime wave that an inefficient police force had failed to halt.

"We were hoping that you will stay in town through Sunday," began Lorne, in an earnest tone. "We are planning a special show—a show for charity—"

"You'd better talk to Belker," snapped Norgil. "He's the one man who can find ways to make actors work for nothing."

Lorne's earnestness changed to sympathy. He started to say something; then caught himself. In an undertone, he requested:

"Could you have dinner with me, Norgil?"

Sensing something deeper in the invitation, Norgil agreed. They went out by the stage door, around the elbow of a long, deserted alley, and reached Lorne's car, which was manned by a chauffeur. After a half mile ride, they stopped at the town's best restaurant, and were ushered to a private booth, at the rear.

By then, Lorne had heard Norgil's story.

"So, Belker tried to chisel you," commented the gray haired man. "I am not at all surprised. We have heard that he uses such tactics. It fits in with what I am about to tell you."

Lorne beckoned. A solemn man with deep-lined features came over from another table, bringing along a derby hat that he plucked from a hat stand. Lorne introduced the arrival as James Blissop. In a methodical manner, Blissop produced credentials and showed them to Norgil. They identified the owner as a private detective.

"Blissop was brought here by the Civic Committee," explained Lorne. "He has checked on the findings of the police, and has carried his investigation much further. Give us your full report, Blissop."

The solemn-faced operative spread a sheaf of thin, closely-typed papers on the table, and concentrated on the high spots. First, he covered facts that Norgil had read in the newspapers. After every one of five robberies, the police had questioned Trip Shavey, the only local racketeer. Trip, at present operating within the law, had provided alibis for all the members of his so-called mob.

Lorne interrupted at that point.

"It's outrageous!" he declared. "These robberies of jewelry stores, loan offices, finally the Westbury Trust Co., are the sort that no one but Trip would have dared! Yet evidence is lacking—"

"Because of the man higher up," inserted Blissop. "I've pointed that out to you, Mr. Lorne. It took someone who could visit those places unsuspected, to pave the way for a smooth run of quick jobs. What's more, they need a brain to get rid of the hauls.

"There's a lot of candidates; but the one who fills the bill to a T is Harvey Belker. He goes to all those places, to leave this theater placards. What's more, every Friday night, he drives over to Pittsford and gives the box-office receipts to old Martindale, who owns the theater circuit."

Blissop paused, thumbed through the report sheets. He mentioned that the Shavey mob had a favorite alibi. The members claimed that they were at the Isis Theater when the robberies took place. Ushers testified that they had seen them enter before the show, and leave afterward.

"It would be easy to sneak out and in," argued Blissop, pointedly, "particularly if the ushers were told to remember some things, but not others. It looks like a real tie-up, Mr. Lorne."

NORGIL was thinking of another point. This happened to be Friday night. The Westbury Trust robbery was only two days old. When Belker made his trip to the Pittsford tonight, it would be his first chance to take along the stolen bank funds. Norgil waited to see if the others would bring up the fact. They did.

But they produced another important angle; one that the newspapers had not mentioned in connection with the robbery. Lorne had positive information that the twenty-five thousand dollars stolen from the Westbury Trust consisted of listed currency.

"If we can prove that Belker has that money," insisted Lorne, "we will have the goods on him, and the Shavey mob, as well. That's where you can help us, Norgil."

"Belker carries the theater funds in a steel suitcase," added Blissop, "and he has the nerve"—the operative inserted a snort—"to ask for a police escort to take him clear into Pittsford."

"We might have him arrested there, Blissop—"

"And lose out, if he was fox enough to outguess us? We'd be sunk, if we did that, Mr. Lorne. No, you'd better tell Norgil our original plan, and get him to help us."

Lorne explained the plan. It was to substitute an identical suitcase for the one that Belker used, just before the theater manager started his Friday night trip to Pittsford. Lorne and Blissop would then speed ahead, and reach Martindale first.

A close friend of the circuit owner, Lorne would explain matters to Martindale, and let him open Belker's suitcase, since Martindale would unquestionably know the combination. If the bank money proved to be with the theater receipts, Belker would be arrested on arrival. If not, Martindale could simply take the duplicate from Belker, and give him back the original.

"We could work the same stunt over again, then," put in Blissop. "But what we can't do, is let Belker go out of here with his own suitcase. He'd have too many chances to drop the bank dough somewhere in Pittsford. That's what he's done with the other stuff the Shavey mob stole."

It was quite plain how Norgil fitted into the scheme of things. Belker's office was a stronghold. When unlocked, two ushers guarded it. After theater hours, its strong door was locked. The present job called for a visit there, at a particular time; namely, just before Belker started on his trip to Pittsford. Norgil, it so happened, was the only man in town who had free access to the office—except Belker himself.

Carrying a suitcase in and out, under the noses of the ushers, was another problem; one that Lorne and Blissop hoped Norgil's ingenuity could solve. While the magician was pondering over the prospect, and getting nowhere, Lorne suddenly snapped his fingers.

"I have it!" Lorne told them. "We can send in a package addressed to Norgil, with the duplicate suitcase inside it. When you go to Belker's office"—Lorne had turned to Norgil—"you can change the suitcases, and bring out the package. We'll be waiting in my car, so you can join us."

The idea was excellent. Blissop added that he could find a way to draw Belker to the box-office long enough for Norgil to make the switch. The only trouble was that Belker usually left the theater before the stage show was over. Lorne asked if Norgil could send someone to the office in his stead. The magician shook his head.

"No," he said, "but I can handle it quite easily during my ghost act. The stage is dark for five minutes, with spooks floating all over it. I don't have to be there.

"Moreover, I'll have a good excuse for staying in the office a few minutes. The box-office reports

will be there, covering the entire week. It's only natural that I would want to look them over before Belker leaves."

The plan complete, Blissop left the restaurant, and Norgil dined with Lorne. They no longer discussed the trapping of Belker; their conversation concerned the charity show that Lorne had mentioned. A far more generous person than the stingy theater manager, Lorne volunteered to pay Norgil a fair-sized fee out of his own pocket, with the understanding that the arrangement would be a confidential one.

Norgil was smiling when he left the restaurant, to return to the theater by cab. It wasn't because he had booked a special show at a price that made it worth while. His real thrill came when he looked forward to the night's adventure.

It would give him another chance to strike at crime, to add a new exploit to a string of similar accomplishments which had given him repute as a detective along with his fame as a magician. In addition, there was the matter of Belker.

Norgil had found his chance finally to settle his feud with the glowery theater manager in a manner which Belker would remember for a long while to come.

CHAPTER III
CROOKS IN THE KNOW

HARVEY Belker was in his office when Norgil stopped there. The theater manager made no reference to their settled dispute; in fact he seemed genuinely cordial, as though he admired Norgil for having outwitted him. He even offered the magician a cigar from his pocket, instead of from the box on his desk.

When Norgil mentioned the matter of box-office reports, Belker promised to have them in the office early, along with a signed check, for the magician's percentage. Then:

"It's been a big week, Norgil," affirmed Belker. "We've broken all records. I just talked to Mr. Martindale by long distance; he hopes you'll consider us for a return engagement."

Norgil smiled; he was understanding the reason for Belker's sudden affability.

"You've got a great show," Belker went on, "particularly the finish. The Lady and the Lion wows them, out front. For a while, some of the wiseacres thought you were using twin girls, but they've given up that theory."

"Only one lady," returned Norgil, with a smile, "and only one lion."

"The lady travels mighty quick," conceded Belker. "It's only about ten seconds between the time when you fire at the cabinet, and when you shoot at the glass box. But I still like the lion. He looks alive; different from some of those moth-eaten brutes that they drag along with punk animal acts."

"Tongo is an old trouper," said Norgil. "Any circus man would know him. He used to work in Roxoni's act, before I bought him."

Belker didn't seem to recall Roxoni, which wasn't surprising, since the animal trainer had never played in theaters. He remarked, too, that he knew very few circus men. Conversation lagging, Norgil left to prepare for the last show.

Outside the office door he ran into the two ushers. One had just come on duty; mistaking Norgil for Belker, the fellow turned, with the comment:

"Trip Shavey and his mob just moved in, boss. They've gone down to their usual box—"

The other usher inserted a warning psst. Suddenly recognizing Norgil, the first fellow stammered explanations.

"We... we're just supposed to keep an eye on them," he said. "You know... well, maybe you don't know, Mr. Norgil, but—"

"They've used Mr. Belker as the goat," put in the second usher. "He's tired of being called in to alibi them. That's all there is to it."

Passing the box, Norgil glanced through the curtains, saw a cluster of half a dozen men watching the feature picture. Continuing backstage, he reached his dressing room. Calling in Fritz, his chief assistant, Norgil arranged a new schedule for the show, putting the ghost act closer to the finale.

WHEN the curtain rose on Norgil's show, the magician set to work in smooth style producing bouquets of flowers, bringing bowls of goldfish and huge urns of fire from the folds of large silk cloths. It wasn't until he reached the cigarette-catching act that he looked over the six men in the box.

It was easy to pick out Trip Shavey. The Westbury bad man was chunky, with a big-jawed, square-shaped face that nestled deep between his hunched shoulders. Arms folded, he sat like a king among an assorted lot of retainers.

Trip had apparently picked up his followers from various walks of life. None had a distinctly thuggish look; that wouldn't have done in a small city like Westbury. Still, all were the sort of gentry to be avoided in dark alleys, or even in theater boxes.

It was evident that most of them had seen the show before; the way they cocked their heads together, giving nods and shakes, was proof that they were discussing the tricks they witnessed. Proceeding with the act, Norgil forgot them for the time.

When the stage blackened for the ghost act Norgil moved out through the aisle, passing the

box in total darkness. He was carrying a revolver loaded with bona fide cartridges instead of blanks, just in case any of Trip's mob should be at large with similar weapons handy.

At the office door, Norgil came upon the two ushers. This time both were startled. They thought that the magician was on the stage with the spooks.

"I just came through to look over the reports," informed Norgil, with a friendly chuckle. "Mr. Belker said they would be in the office."

Satisfied that Norgil wasn't one of his own ghosts, the ushers passed him through; one of them remarked that a package had arrived for the magician, and was in the office, alongside of Belker's desk. Three minutes later, Norgil came out, bringing the package with him. It was a sizable package, considerably larger than Belker's metal suitcase. It was quite heavy, too, but Norgil managed it with one arm, as he went back along the aisle.

HE was keeping the package against his left side, toward the theater box, as he passed. No one challenging him, Norgil pocketed his gun before he reached the stage. Continuing to the dressing room, he ripped open the roughly wrapped package, and put the locked suitcase beneath the makeup table. Dumping the cartridges from his revolver, Norgil replaced them with blanks.

The ghosts had finished their cavort. Norgil was onstage when the lights appeared, with assistants wheeling on trunks, cabinets, and huge metal tubes from a series of illusions called The Triple Mystery.

Lights appeared at the back of the theater; Norgil saw Belker hurrying out from the office, carrying a suitcase. Then, Norgil was shooting away with blanks, while girls disappeared from cabinets and tubes, to arrive in trunks, and vice versa.

Miriam was among the vanishing contingent. After one of her rapid disappearances, she arrived off-stage and went through the same door that Norgil had used on his trips to Belker's office. She was scheduled to arrive at the back of the audience, and usually she went around by the stage alley. But the outside route was a long one at the Isis Theater, and Miriam was using the inside way instead.

She was attired in a Pierrot costume of darkish pattern; but, rather than be seen too soon, Miriam stopped close to the curtains of a box. As she waited there, she caught snatches of a conversation that interested her immensely.

"Norgil pulled a smart sneak," a rough voice undertoned, "but he doesn't know that Jerry is working with us, and saw him lug that package into his dressing room."

Miriam recognized the name Jerry as belonging to the man on duty at the stage door. She realized that the speaker must be Trip Shavey, the Westbury big shot. Remembering the newspaper accounts of the alibis, Miriam could guess the route the crooks used; through a side exit, leading out into the back alley, where Jerry could tip them off when all was clear.

"When he finishes the show," added Trip, "we'll lay for him out in the alley. He'll have the swag right with him—"

Trip halted. Peering through the curtains, Miriam saw him speaking to a scrawny, pasty-faced hoodlum who had turned full about. She heard Trip query: "What is it, Geek?" Then Miriam realized that the pasty man was nudging toward the curtains.

Momentarily, Miriam was petrified. Pistol shots from the stage brought her back to life; they were her cue. Whisking from the curtains, Miriam sidled rapidly along the aisle, to the back of the theater. Then, in response to the final report, she dashed down the center aisle, shouting: "Here I am!"

Miriam's return to the stage was the finish of the Triple Mystery. But she didn't have a chance to speak to Norgil, amid the *ta-da-dahhh* of the orchestra. There would be plenty of time, though, later. At present Miriam had to hurry off stage and shed the Pierrot costume, to be ready for the lion illusion.

The girl didn't glance toward Trip's box as she went offstage. It was well, perhaps, that she did not. A gun muzzle was poking under the rail of the box, following her march.

"Shall I give it, Trip?"

"Cripes, no!" Trip pulled the gunner's hand back. "Put away that heater, Morry!"

"But the dame listened in."

"I know. We'll handle her." Turning from Morry, Trip questioned: "What was it you were telling me, Geek? You know—about Roxoni, the guy that used to do the lion act?"

Geek whispered details. Watching the stage, where Norgil had begun the paper-tearing routine, Trip Shavey chuckled. He spoke confidently to the listeners about him.

Don't worry about the dame" assured Trip. "She'll never spill what she knows. After what's going to happen, Norgil will be a setup when we meet him outside."

CHAPTER IV
THE VANISHED VICTIM

THE paper trick was over. With curtains spreading to display the huge draped cabinet, Norgil was inviting a committee on the stage to view his most sensational illusion—the Lady and the Lion. He studied the committee members as they arrived.

There was one whose looks Norgil didn't like; the fellow was scrawny and pasty-faced. The rest of the committee was all right; one trouble maker wouldn't matter, not with assistants on the alert. Pointing the visitors to the chairs, Norgil turned to introduce Miriam.

The girl looked frail, as well as shapely, in the garb of sparkling jewels that she had worn beneath the Pierrot costume. She seemed smaller without the fluffy clothes, and shorter, too, because she had no shoes. Her face was grim, her lips tight-pressed; but that was part of the act.

Concerned with his own problems, Norgil did not realize how much Miriam had to tell him, how anxious she was to speak. But, like Norgil, she was biding her time, sure that opportunity would soon arrive. Without a word, Miriam entered the huge draped cabinet.

Assistants tightened the curtains and pushed away the stepladders. The audience was breathless; but there was a stir among the committee members. Such was common; for they were always nervous, particularly when Norgil aimed his gun at the big cabinet.

Norgil heard one man give a gasp; another, a frantic shout that sounded like "Hutt!" A chair was overturned, just as Norgil fired. But the clatter of the chair, the crash-bang of the orchestra, was as nothing compared to the terrific smash that came from the cabinet itself.

The great contrivance quivered, while the assistants were yanking at the cords. Rattling, it seemed to shake the falling curtains from its sides. Shrieks rose from the audience, as they saw the cage—with the lion in it.

Tongo had made a terrific leap clear across the cage. He was raging, his roars sounded like bellows as he tried to tear his way through the latched door. From a powerful though tractable beast, the lion had become a fierce jungle killer, behaving with a maddened zeal that Norgil had never seen him display.

Norgil was no lion tamer, but he had to avert a panic. Already the committeemen were diving for the audience, needing no encouragement. People were scrambling from their seats; others, screaming in the aisles. Leaping for the cage, Norgil grabbed the big door handle with his left hand, to prevent it from bouncing loose. With his right, he thrust the revolver toward Tongo's wide spread jaws and fired a blank shot.

THE lion dropped back, subdued, one big paw covering his face in an almost comical fashion. The tension was temporarily relieved; then from the audience, came frantic shouts:

"The lady! The lady!"

Norgil turned toward the other side of the stage, pointing his gun at the forgotten framework where the assistants had lowered the spring blinds. He fired; the blinds whizzed upward. Miriam emerged from the glass box, to reach the stage and take her bow.

The audience kept up the applause until finally Miriam found herself wondering what it was all about. The curtains had closed. Norgil was out by the footlights, receiving plaudits that seemed to rock the house. Looking about, Miriam saw assistants wheeling the lion's cage to its corner, past Norgil's dressing room. They were handling the cage gingerly, shaking their heads as they gazed at Tongo, who sat viewing them with a sphinx-like pose.

Forgetting her kimono and slippers, Miriam pattered barefooted across the stage, to find out the trouble. The assistants were gone when she reached the cage; they didn't seem to like Tongo. But, to Miriam, the lion looked as gentle as ever; she was talking to him, coaxingly, when a last rally of applause reminded her that she had much to tell Norgil.

Turning, Miriam saw the magician going toward his dressing room. Tripping in his direction, Miriam called quickly. Norgil heard her; swung about, and came toward the lion's cage. Meeting her half way, Norgil began to talk, before Miriam had a chance.

"Tongo went beserk," he told her. "If the illusion worked the way these wise birds think it does, you'd have been a goner, Miriam. Tongo was on the jump before the curtains dropped."

"But... but—"

"Fortunately," interposed Norgil, not realizing that Miriam wanted to bring up another subject, "you reached the glass box before Tongo appeared; not afterward, as people figure it. So you were safe enough; and yet—"

He paused, rubbing his chin. Miriam found her chance to talk.

"Crooks are after you!" she warned. "I heard them talking in a box—"

"Trip Shavey and his mob?"

"I think so. There was a man named Geek with them; his name was the only one I heard."

The name gave Norgil a linking thought. Quickly, he questioned:

"Did you see this fellow called Geek?"

"Yes," replied Miriam. "He was little, and his face was ugly; it must have been very white, or pasty, for I could see it, although the light wasn't very good."

THE link was complete in Norgil's mind. Geek was the unsavory member of the committee. Chafing because he hadn't guessed the whole thing earlier, Norgil scarcely realized that Miriam was telling him other facts. At last, he caught her repeated words.

"You've got something that they want," insisted Miram. "A package, in your dressing room. They're going to grab you in the alley, and from the way they talked they mean murder. Jerry, the man at the stage door, is working with them. He will signal them when they have their chance."

Norgil smiled.

"Thanks for the details," he said. "Particularly regarding Jerry. I hadn't exactly figured that he was in it. But don't worry, Miriam. I didn't intend to go out through that alley."

"Then there's no danger?"

"No danger," began Norgil, only to pause, with a frown. "No danger, unless—"

He turned toward the dressing room, too late. A snarly voice was interrupting, as he swung about. Miriam withheld a scream as she saw Trip Shavey standing with a drawn gun, his mob sneaking up behind him. With a deft twist, Norgil caught Miriam, whipped her under one protecting arm as he yanked out a gun to match Trip's.

Mobbies dived for cover among boxes and other props; if Trip had done the same, Norgil would have managed an escape, with Miriam. But Trip didn't budge. Coolly, he kept Norgil covered by shifting his gun muzzles.

"That rod's no good," sneered Trip. "I saw you singe the lion's whiskers with it. Come on, guys, move in. Norgil only has a load of blanks."

Miriam's eyes went shut. Firmly snuggled in Norgil's clasp, she wondered why Trip and his crew didn't shoot. Norgil evidently knew why, for he remained quite calm. Trip's next words explained the situation.

"We don't want any fireworks," declared the crook. "But if you start them, Norgil, we'll follow through. It will be curtains for you and the dame if you shoot any blanks to bring your crowd around here. We'll make a getaway—but you two won't!

"If you hand over that gat, nice and quiet, we'll talk terms. You'll have to come along with us, but we'll treat you easy, both of you. We're not after you"—his tone was emphatic—"we're after dough. So how about it?"

Hesitatingly, Norgil drew back a few steps; then, as Trip and the mob shoved closer, he let the stage revolver dangle from his fingers, so that Trip could take it. The big shot accepted the gun with a wise nod.

"Now you're showing sense," he said, approvingly. "A lot of sense, Norgil."

Behind that statement, Trip hid a smirk; one, however, that Norgil could detect. Trip felt that he had clinched the game; that he had talked Norgil into signing a double death warrant for himself and Miriam.

But there was another angle to the game—one that Trip had practically forgotten. Behind pretended surrender Norgil was harboring a scheme that promised triumph, even against the odds that now surrounded him!

CHAPTER V
NORGIL'S RESCUER

It was still a perfect setup, as Trip Shavey saw it. His original plan was to nab Norgil in the crooked alley, when the magician started out to keep his rendezvous with Mervin Lorne. If Tongo had finished Miriam, Trip could have gone through with the scheme.

So, at least, Trip thought. At present, he intended to eventually work it as planned. Once Norgil and Miriam were on their way out through the alley, they would find treachery, not safety. Shots out there would not matter; not with cars waiting for a quick getaway.

But Trip had a matter to attend to, first.

"The keys come next," he told Norgil. "We want to get into your dressing room, so you just hand them over."

Again Norgil hesitated, drawing back. Trip didn't mind. Norgil couldn't go beyond the lion's cage, and the farther he withdrew toward the corner, the less chance there would be of anyone observing the one-sided scene.

The crooks drew closer, threatening with their guns. In fumbling, nervous fashion, Norgil, produced the keys and let Trip take them. The big shot handed the keys to Geek, told the scrawny crook to unlock the dressing room and bring out the metal suitcase that he found there.

While Geek was following orders, Norgil found himself back against the cage. His left arm still encircled Miriam; he could feel her tremble as his hand pressed her side between the strips of girdling spangles. But it was eagerness, not fear that made her quiver.

Miriam mistrusted Trip's promise, but felt that Norgil did, too. She was confident that the magician could find some way out of this hideous dilemma. Trip didn't share the opinion. He was watching Norgil's right arm, which was half lifted. He saw the arm waver, sink wearily upon the door handle of the lion's cage, which served as a rest for Norgil's tired elbow.

Somewhat contemptuously, Trip let his gun hand relax, to keep Norgil sold on the false promise. The crooks who were shouldering close beside Trip copied their leader's example. It was just as Norgil wanted it.

Suddenly stiffening, Norgil drove his right elbow downward, slashing the door handle with it. His left arm, flinging wide, carried Miriam with its

It was Tongo, the lion, bashing the cage door open.

plucking hand, sent the girl tumbling from danger. With a forward dive below the muzzles of the covering guns, Norgil yelled: "Hutt!"

Crooks fired, their first shots an instant too late to wing the diving magician. Another tug at their triggers and they would have riddled him and Miriam as well, but their chance never came. Instead, they were greeted by a tawny avalanche that weighed at least a quarter of a ton.

It was Tongo, bashing the cage door wide ahead of him, as he made a ferocious, twelve-foot spring. All claws and teeth, the powerful lion was leaping for human prey. Norgil had flattened, short of the gigantic leap, but Tongo had all the target that he needed.

The lion was aiming for five men at once—Trip, and the four mobbies who clustered close to him. They were coming up with their guns, but they might as well have wagged reproving fingers. Tongo hit them with the force of a hurricane before their revolvers could blast.

FROM where she had somersaulted among the boxes, Miriam propped herself on bare knees and elbows, a lone witness to the startling scene, for Norgil was rolling back beneath the lion's cage. Tongo had flattened Trip and two others with his tremendous surge; he was pawing at the pair who were trying to escape, bringing them back, alive.

That didn't help Trip and the shrieking crooks who were sprawled beside him. Tongo's hind paws were wiping them like doormats, and he wasn't sparing with the claws. When it came to cleaning up a mob at close range, Tongo could have given pointers to a squad of Feds.

There were others, though, more distant. Geek was coming from the office, bringing the metal suitcase. Jerry joined him, from the stage door. Both had guns, and were aiming for the victorious lion. Right then Norgil returned Tongo's favor.

Out from beneath the cage the magician scooped up a gun that one of Trip's men had dropped. Shooting past Tongo, he clipped Geek and Jerry in their tracks. Only Geek managed to stagger away; the steel suitcase had deflected some of Norgil's bullets. But Geek did not travel far.

Grabbed by Norgil's assistants and members of the stage crew, the crook flung the box into the alley. There, two waiting men scooped it up, only to be blocked off by police, who arrived unexpectedly, in response to the gunfire. Norgil saw that capture, as he neared the door. Roars from behind him warned him of a last danger.

Crooks were settled; the one problem was Tongo. The rampant lion had left five cripples in his wake, and was coming after more. Flinging aside his revolver, Norgil grabbed for another lying on the floor; one he recognized. Beating Tongo to the spot by a scant margin, Nogril provided the only antidote—blank shots from the stage revolver.

The rescuer didn't want to quit; but he changed his mind, under the blank barrage. Norgil was wishing he had more cartridges, when Miriam took over. The girl arrived with a broom and smacked Tongo on the nose to encourage his retreat. Perhaps her costume, or comparative lack of one, reminded Tongo of the natives who had subdued him in the jungle, for he yielded to the girl's persuasion.

Backed against the cage, Tongo turned about, gave a clumpy hop into his roost. His last argument was a regretful snarl, that came when Miriam clanged the door and snapped the heavy handle into place.

The police were dragging two captives into the light. Norgil stepped up to face Mervin Lorne and the private detective, Blissop. Holding the metal suitcase, Lorne pleaded with Norgil to explain matters. Coolly, Norgil waited until another man arrived—the theater manager, Harvey Belker.

Like Lorne, Belker was carrying a heavy suitcase. He started to shake hands with Norgil.

"I found your note," declared Belker. "These police are my escort. I had them turn about, as you suggested."

"I have another suggestion," offered Norgil. "Open the suitcase, Belker."

Belker opened it, brought out packages of cash. The police examined them, found them to be the theater funds.

"Quite simple, wasn't it?" queried Norgil, turning to Lorne. "Your phony game sounded too good, Lorne, so I didn't switch the suitcases at all. Suppose you open yours."

LORNE refused. Norgil turned to Blissop, who was standing stupefied.

"You probably know the combination," said Norgil. "You open it, before I make you show your fake credentials. There's no use bluffing, Blissop. That derby hat won't keep you from being labeled as a member of Trip's mob."

Mouthing that all the blame belonged to Lorne, Blissop took the second suitcase and unlocked it. Inside, the police found the stolen bank funds, recognizable by their printed bands.

"A very nice plan," explained Norgil. "Lorne was the brain behind the racket; but he hadn't figured out a way for Trip to get into Belker's office and grab the theater funds. So he saved that for the last job.

"I was to pull the job, without knowing it, by switching the suitcases. Trip and his mob were set to rub me out and take the suitcase with the theater money. A phone call to Pittsford would have led to Belker's arrest. A nice spot for you, Belker"—

Norgil turned to the theater manager—"to be found with the stolen bank funds in your possession.

"Lorne didn't want that money; it was too hot. So he figured you'd make a perfect goat. The law would be pleased because it had caught the brain, even though Trip and company would be gone, to permanent safety."

The police took Lorne and Blissop away, along with the evidence captured in Lorne's own possession. Ambulance crews arrived to carry out Trip Shavey and his followers; or, more exactly, what Tongo had left of them. It was afterward that Norgil went to Belker's office, accompanied by Miriam, who had changed to natty street attire.

Belker proved very humble.

"Considering the raw deal I tried to hand you," he said, "it's a wonder that you trusted me, Norgil."

"That's still puzzling Lorne," laughed Norgil, "but the question answers itself."

"Just how?"

"No big brain would have tried to chisel, even in a partly legitimate way. Not with a whole campaign of crime at stake. You proved yourself small, Belker, and that was why I reasoned that Lorne was big."

Taking the censure almost gladly, Belker announced that he was cured, and handed over some good cigars. Then he wanted to know about Tongo; how the lion had served Norgil in the pinch.

"Tongo killed Roxoni," explained Norgil, "but it wasn't Tongo's fault. The lion was trained to leap at a certain cue. Roxoni was drunk, one night, and didn't get clear in time. That's why I said that any circus man would know Tongo."

"And you knew the cue, and—"

"No, I didn't," Norgil admitted. "I never wanted it. But Geek was a sideshow man; his nickname is the term they have for snake-eaters. He happened to know Tongo, and the cue, too."

"That's why he came on stage!" exclaimed Miriam. "He wanted Tongo to trap me in the cage!"

"Yes, but the lady was gone," smiled Norgil, "and only the lion showed up. I heard that cue, and sprang it when I needed it. Of course, Tongo did the rest."

Glancing at his watch, Belker suggested that he call a restaurant and have a dinner sent over to the theater. He emphasized that the party was to be his; the more it cost, the better. Norgil took Belker at his word.

"The first thing on the order," said the magician, "is eleven pounds of beefsteak."

Belker didn't understand. He saw Norgil smile at Miriam, who did.

"Eleven pounds," repeated Norgil. "One pound for the lady, and ten pounds for the lion."

THE END

Walter Gibson

Walter B. Gibson (1897-1985) was one of the most prolific American writers of the twentieth century. An accomplished magician and former Philadelphia newspaperman, Gibson wrote 282 *Shadow* pulp novels under the house name "Maxwell Grant," creating Lamont Cranston and the characters and mythos that would later be featured in the legendary MBS radio series. The host of ABC's *Strange* also wrote more than 500 magazine stories and articles, thousands of syndicated newspaper features and hundreds of comic and radio scripts including *Nick Carter: Master Detective, Blackstone the Magic Detective, The Avenger* and *The Adventures of Frank Merriwell.* In addition to his *Shadow* novels, Gibson wrote more than 150 books including *Hoyle's Simplified Guide to the Popular Card Games, Fell's Guide to Knots and How to Tie Them, Houdini's Escapes, Blackstone's Secrets of Magic, The Twilight Zone, The Complete Illustrated Book of the Psychic Sciences* and *The Man from UNCLE: The Coin of El Diablo Affair.* The ghost writer and biographer of Houdini, Blackstone, Thurston and Dunninger, Gibson drew upon his lifelong interest in prestidigitation in his 23 Norgil novelettes.

Paul Orban

Paul Orban (1896-1974) was born in Budapest, Hungary and emigrated to the U.S. with his family in 1901. Growing up in Chicago, he decided to pursue a career in art after selling a watercolor for five dollars when he was fourteen. He studied at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts, and received his first publishing assignments in 1915 from the Chicago *Sunday Tribune*, where he worked as a staff artist. He later illustrated serializations of Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu novels for the newspaper.

Orban moved to Mount Vernon, NY in 1929 and the following year began selling interior story illustrations to pulp magazines, including *Golden Book* and *Clues*. He was soon busy providing interior art for *Astounding Science Fiction, Doc Savage, Detective Novels, Horror Stories, Popular Detective, Texas Rangers, Thrilling Mystery* and *Western Story,* and later illustrated the lead novels in *The Whisperer, The Avenger* and *The Shadow.*

In later years, Paul Orban illustrated educational filmstrips and textbooks, but retained a special fondness for his earlier pulp career. "I do miss doing the line and brush drawings," he wrote in 1965. "There was great stuff done in the days of the pulps."

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